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P'án Ku

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P'AN KU

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I have written about you
and wondered who you were
and tried to teach myself your lesson
I have dreamed about you
and thought you maybe some saint
and longed to forget your black star eyes
I have mourned about you
and missed your flash and thunder
and searched inside the rooms these many days
I have died about you

MARY PITTMAN

Robin was full of things to say in the country restaurant of stares

hanging, he told me, was an erotic death
to lunge by the neck in space still thinking
much better than burning where pain distorts the mind

I couldn't stand to listen but watched his face tremor so slightly
framed in tendrils of brown coloured hair

he had a way of hypnotizing you into thinking
he knew secrets somehow

pain, he said, is the way to sensitivity
suffering is a pain
a slower pain which lingers in the surrounding

I am suffering I told him
and he already knew

dark Indian-red trains
ran with me
nowhere
everywhere I wanted to be
carrying me back to the country
under rainbows which encircled every tree
through sunbleached days
and moonshine nights
until again I saw the cities of reality
beneath neon lights
and I put shoes on my feet
and hated everyman

Ben's Swing in the Woods

in the homemade swing
that spring honeysuckle night
the whole world revolved around me
in spinning greens and strange night songs
too fast to catch even a fragment of remembrance
and I was intoxicated by life
and could not tell the fireflies from the stars

Miccousukee Road

flashing rain on red dirt roads
in a burst of volatile summer changing
emerald dripping leaves
splashed by amber shafts of falling sunlight
reflecting in pools of scarlet rainwater
as I wash my face with life

Alan the war did not tear your limbs from you
and mercifully murder you on the hot jungle bed
instead it gave you smiling
A multitude of living days
in which to think about the trap which caught you
quite suddenly back home
some sound which turning was another man you shot
so that you might live to eat the national meat of dog
and then swallow in the suffocated night
in so many sun wave days
like any other meals
they carved you down to base instinct
and still expected you to run back home
and take the knife and fork of God
I am useless now to kill those men behind your eyes
that wander out into your gazing stare
Alan the war did not tear your limbs from you

I can see Bill on the steps
 Reading Bertrand Russell and bursting out
 in emphasized words
This man is really good
 and pointing each syllable at me with his finger
 he was crazy anyway
 and used to pick wild strawberries from the woods
 and shake pecans from the trees into grocery bags
 telling me it was cheap to live
 if you didn't have any money and weren't expecting any
 And we would walk down to the starry ravine and lay
 flat on our backs
 drinking 89¢ Chianti and watch the black sky play through the trees
 until I had drunk enough to tell him things that had happened to me during the weeks
 which
 were
 tearing
 me
 slowly
 apart
 and he would tell me
 (excitedly)
 that I was losing my identity and had better watch out for it
 or he would leave me
 and then laughing
 saying
 I am nothing so don't miss me
 looking
 through these nights
 into his eyes
 I thought
 he must have been
 the prophet
 or someone

MARY PITTMAN

Black Bart and the Laundromat

by Fred Thurber

I knew Black Bart as flashing teeth and a con-
fident smile, jet-black hair curling down his neck,
and shining coal eyes that burn with lightning as
thoughts swirl within his brain. Large hands, too
lumsy to thread a needle, were quick and able like
an eagle's talons when it came to catching a ball or
taking a hand. He had a big-boned laughing body
that transformed into panther grace when the situ-
ation demanded. There was nothing living that
could hate Black Bart . . . but the cold calculating
electronic hearts of inanimate machines were some-
thing else . . .

Machines hated Black Bart. They hated his
inefficiency in a mechanical society. He was a lost
screw and a stripped gear in the well-oiled con-
vulsion of civilization. Recognizing this, machines
sought to destroy him or at least render him harm-
less.

When I saw Black Bart today, he was pinned
beneath the hood of his car giving the appearance
of being swallowed whole by a man-eating vehicle.
While I released him from his predicament, I re-
membered about his constant attacks from soulless
things built from nuts and bolts. Since childhood,
misadventures struck him. His bottle warmer periodically
scorched his milk, his bicycle brakes always failed
at crucial downhill moments, and his first attempt
at shaving resulted in baldness of half his head and a
manicure from a runaway cordless Norelco.

His latest calamity was brought on by a car
accident on self-destruction as long as Black Bart was a
passenger. His eventual consumption under the
hood was the end product of a revolt of the car's
safety devices. First the "hot" and "cold" warning
lights on the dash alternately blinked S.O.S. in
International Code, followed by the erratic sound
of the engine convulsing, then the rain of wind-
shield cleaner burst spontaneously upon the wind-
shield and the car stopped. Of course the con-
stricting bands of the seat-belt refused to free him
immediately, but with a mighty effort and some
profound profanity, he released himself. I had
found him just after he had opened the engine

hood to survey the trouble and it collapsed upon
the upper half of his body.

Black Bart was on his way to the laundromat
to wash his sneakers. I felt obligated to help him in
the custom of some forgotten Indian tribe: Once
you save a life you are forever responsible for it.
Black Bart in a laundromat might very well go
down in history as another Waterloo or Little Big-
horn.

The laundromat was well lit. The washers and
dryers stood at attention in neat straight row,
waiting . . .

Black Bart and I entered and found only one
other laundry patron. If the machines were plot-
ting any attempts on Black Bart, there would be at
least two witnesses. I felt thankful for that because
no one would believe me alone.

The other person in the laundromat was a frag-
ile, elderly lady who sat, quietly knitting in front
of a dryer at the far end of the building. She
looked up as we entered, only to identify us as
human, and probably would have returned to her
knitting if Black Bart hadn't started his noisy in-
spection of each washer in search of demons and
hidden booby-traps. He ceased his examination
when he reached the washers in the back where the
lady sat. Here, he selected one of the older
machines on the presumption that age might have
mellowed its effectiveness to do harm and pro-
duced sneakers and detergent from a canvas laun-
dry bag.

Holding the offensive footwear out to the lit-
tle old lady, he smiled, "Dirty sneakers!"

The old lady smiled back approvingly, "Nice."
Everyone liked Black Bart . . .

She must have felt a sense of compatriotism
with a fellow launderer, because she offered ad-
visingly, "You should use bleach as well as deter-
gent. I'm sorry I don't have any, but you can get
some from one of those machines on the wall."

Black Bart shuddered. He was willing to take
on a washer and a dryer, but a vending machine
was raising odds against his survival.

Whistling the theme to "Bridge on the River Kwai," he marched with determination towards his foe. The little old lady watched quizzically and I ducked behind a row of laundry carts as Black Bart searched his pockets for a dime. Finding the bleach he wanted and correlating it to the correct lever, he placed the coin in the slot and pulled the handle.

Black Bart received bleach. He got bleach minus the little plastic bottle it was supposed to be contained in. He got it in a shotgun blast that was beginning to show its pattern of discoloration in a large splattered circle on his blue t-shirt and jeans. Undismayed, he put a second coin in the slot and pulled the lever again. Out came the empty plastic bottle, bent, folded and completely mutilated.

Unable to take anymore, I came around the carts, stepped in front of Black Bart, and succeeded in getting an envelope of dry bleach before he could rip the machine off the wall and pound it mercilessly to death.

Black Bart took the bleach and returned to his washer. The little old lady sat knitting with a distinct twinkle in her eye.

With the ingredients for a successful wash in the machine, he dropped in his sneakers and fished about his pocket for the required quarter and nickel.

A look of frustrative defeat covered his face when he asked, "You got a nickel?"

I shook my head negatively and gestured to the little old lady.

"I'm sorry, again, young man, I don't. I only carry the exact amount of change I need, and as you can see I'm finished drying," the lady answered anticipating Black Bart's request.

"I'll go down the street and see if I can get change at a drug store or something," I volunteered.

"No, no," screamed Black Bart, terrified at the thought of being left alone and at the mercy of the laundramat's hideous contents. "I'll go," he stated, "You stay here and guard my sneakers," and he disappeared out the door into the darkening night.

After fifteen minutes of his absence, something gnawed at me, like an itch beneath the back of my scalp. Black Bart was in trouble. When three quarters of an hour elapsed, I felt my suspicions were confirmed.

An hour later and no Black Bart. I wanted to look for him but the chances of him coming back while I was out searching were too great and I didn't want to miss the show. I did manage to get change of a dollar from two young girls who came in for cokes. I started the wash cycle and continued waiting.

The sneakers were in the dryer when Black Bart reappeared, chauffeured in a squad car with two policemen in it. The officers let Black Bart out, shook their heads in disbelief, and drove on. Black Bart was visibly shaken. He was ragged and tired looking. His once bright eyes were now dim with premature senility. He sat down on a plastic garbage container which collapsed under his weight so that he was almost squatting on the floor. I told me what had happened.

He had gone down the street a couple of blocks to a drug store. It had just closed, but because there were lights still on he rapped on the glass door. At that moment a patrol car drove by and the two officers, seeing him dressed in strangely colored clothes and acting slightly desperate, became inquisitive. They drove the car around the block and parked.

Black Bart, not getting any response from knocking, had decided to cross the street and go further down to a gas station that appeared open. As he stopped to the curb on the far side, he reached out an arm, as carefree people do, to swing himself around a parking meter. The meter must have been part of the conspiracy. It started spitting nickels at him. Four dollars, thirty-five cents and a slug spewed forth from the meter's bank. The coins clattered around Black Bart like the jackpot from a slot-machine at Vegas. Black Bart didn't even notice the blinking red light fast approaching.

He was taken in, questioned about his bleached garb and the meter's peculiar gift, and told he could have a lawyer or a psychiatrist present during questioning. Getting only vague statements about machines out to get him, they placed him in a cell until the investigating report came.

Fifteen minutes later, the report confirmed the fact that he had not tampered with the meter; the lock was worn and broken. There were no marks on it to imply it was jimmied. Black Bart was released. Released technically, that is; for some unknown reason the lock on his cell had jammed. He remained locked in the cell for an hour until a locksmith came and opened the door.

Black Bart had finished his story. I looked at the dryer with his precious sneakers inside. It had stopped and I told him they were done.

He lurched forward from his makeshift seat, yanked the dryer open, and pulled his sneakers out. All that came were the canvas tops. The soles remained inside, hanging like melted mozzarella cheese. The dryer had over-heated.

Black Bart screamed. He had never screamed before in his life. I shrugged my shoulders and walked out of the laundramat, thinking, "To hell with old Indian customs."

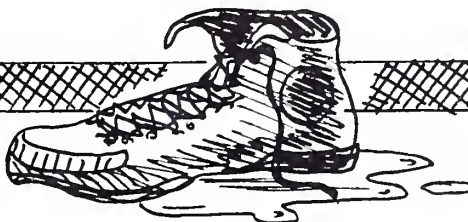
SERVICE

IN EMERGENCY
CALL

USE CORRECT
CHANGE



INSERT
COINS
HERE



L. Jones

The thread
of will
shuns
the needle
that would
dictate
its stitch
and sews
its errant
pattern
in the sampler
of experience.

Close your eyes,
make a wish,
and toss
a tear
into the well
of your dreams.

Each time

the sun rests his chin
on the ledge of the world

and fills the sky
with his flaming brow

you will be the most vivid image in my mind.

I am tracing the intricately patterned
thumbprint of my life.

Clutching, I leave that unseen impression,
enduring my fleeting presence.

As indelible
As it is invisible.
As unique
As it is unalterable.

A bird on silent wing
tips and falls in soundless death
not all tragedy screams.

Just as others have left theirs on me,
in feverish, floundering grasps.
I feel their groping, awkward caresses
obscuring my path, smudging my journey.

In chaotic accumulation
Of damning design.
In multiplying layers
Of grotesque figures.

The lamination of lives.

Before

I squander
the currency
of my soul

Before

I seal
the vault
of my heart

Before

I've spent
the last nickle's worth
of my dreams

Before

I simply
can't afford
love anymore

make a deposit

despair

burns through
fluid eyes
where tears stay
till
eyelids blink
making sorrow
official

Only in the few tantalizing moments
before dawn tightens his grip on day
and sends reluctant shadows scurrying
into their rigid forms
can I love this world.

G. MEREDITH KNOWLAND

Dusk moves his pen

past the face of the sun,
his billowing fingers slightly parted.

The mystery of his message

written in constantly changing script
across the vast page of the sky.

He taunts me to my task

challenging me to transcribe his secret
disguising his truth in confounding beauty.

The Neighbors' House

by Terry Tafoya

"Do what you will before the
Darkness comes, for it
Blemishes the brightness of Day,"
he cried.
"But night time is soothing
And daylight is painful,
So do what you will when you will,"
she sighed.

--- The Song of Sunlit Shadows
by Herman Wells.

"Yes, Helen, I've decided to give up Weight
Watchers, it's just not doing me any good. By the
way, have you been watching that new house the
workmen are putting up?"

"I was by there two weeks ago, Shirlee. I don't
see why anyone in his right mind would buy that
plot of land, let alone try to build a house on it.
It's so long and narrow."

"It's a two-story, too . . . it'll ruin the looks of
the neighborhood."

Helen looked from one side to the other, as if
wanting to see someone hiding in the corners of
Shirlee's home. "Did you hear the latest about that
'nice' Doctor Comby and his nurse?"

"Careful, lady, don't get yourself hurt around
here." The foreman was a heavy man, and sweat
pimples ringed his neck.

"I was just looking," said Shirlee, "Say, you
don't know anything about the people who are
building this place, do you? Looks like a restau-
rant. Imagine that, a restaurant, and in this neigh-
borhood, too. Why, do you know how much our
house cost?"

"No lady, I don't know the people, the man
did the blueprints all by himself. Must have been

me kind of screwball, or something, though . . .
all these angles and planes."

"When will you start putting the second floor
? I always thought you built the top part before
you put the walls up and began to plaster them."

"It don't have no second floor, lady."

"What do you mean?" Shirlee stared at the tall
alls, as though the house would melt into a
nch-style if she looked hard enough.

"It ain't got no second floor." He looked at
er, watching the questions rise in her face. "And
s got one window, smack dab in the middle of
e roof." He wallowed the sentence in his mouth,
though it had a good taste. "In the middle of the
of," he repeated.

"Well, I never. Just wait until I tell Helen."
he walked off. "And Julie." The foreman
atched her move from one house to another.
And Ethel, and Valerie."

"Is it ready, will it be soon?" the woman
sked her husband.

"Another week, perhaps a day after that.
es," he smiled in the darkness to her even darker
ves. "It will be soon."

"Let's look at the plans once more; I still can-
ot believe that it is happening. Our own house."
ne ran her finger over the curling paper. "Our
wn window."

"And each day, each day the sun will come."
e shivered, thinking about it. "I love you," he
hispered, feeling her long, heavy hair, gently
ented with sandalwood.

"At noon," she whispered back.

"So, anyway, Harriet, I said to him, I said . . ."
Shirlee stopped.

"Look out there," she pointed out the picture
indow. "There, did you see them?"

"Why, there're people out there." She put her

drink on a coaster. "Just what do they think
they're doing?"

"They're heading in the direction of that new
house." Shirlee gloated, "I bet that's the new peo-
ple."

Harriet took another sip of her drink. "That's
them all right. The kind that would walk out at
night are just the type to build a house with no
windows."

"Except one in the middle of the roof. Listen,
did I tell you about Helen and Doctor Comby?"

"It's beautiful," the woman breathed. "Even
better and grander than I had imagined."

"The window, look through the window." The
man jabbed his finger upwards, and seemed to bal-
ance a faint crescent of a moon on its tip.

"The air is moist, almost like the sea . . .
remember last year, when we thought we had
found the perfect place to stay, by the beach in
that stone cottage?"

"But it wasn't," he laughed. "This is the place,
the only one for us."

"And the people around us? Are they far
enough away to leave us alone?"

"I hope so, my darling, I hope so."

"I tell you, Valerie, that Harriet's got to watch
it. I think she's hitting that bottle pretty hard,
don't you? I watched her put away five stiff drinks
while I was over at her house last night, and she
had been drinking before I came over."

"Well, honey," Valerie said in a southern slur,
"ya just gotta expect it of someone like that. Her
daddy was one of them nigger lovers, ya know.
Thank God he died on a civil rights march before
they became popular. Hardly nobody remembers
anymore, excepting me. It'd drive anyone to
drink."

"Did you happen to look outside last night?"
Shirlee patted out a cigarette from her pack.

"Why, no, ya know after I had them new silk drapes put up Ah never open them."

"I saw the new neighbors. They were walking to their house, that funny one, with the no windows? Well, they still haven't come out yet. I've been watching them, and I made little Tommy sit out on the doorstoop to see if they'd leave while I was shopping. I got a great buy on the lambchops at Phil's place. Have you been there lately?"

"I can feel the darkness, can't you? Sometimes it's sticky, but now it ripples over my skin like moonlight wants to, tries to do." She touched her husband's white face.

"I'm waiting," he stated. "It's almost time, almost noon. Then I'll open the window." She could feel his pride swell like a drop of water right before it fell.

"Can't you smell the excitement in the air? And the freshness of the paint?"

"Ten more minutes, my darling, only ten."

"I tell you, Ethel, that couple's no good. I looked up the court records; my husband's a judge, you know . . ."

"Yes, Shirlee, I know."

"Anyway, I couldn't find anything out about them. They've been in there now ever since sunset last night, and haven't been out."

"Maybe they like it in there."

"I don't know. I'm going over there later on and have a look around."

"Honestly, Shirlee, maybe they're newlyweds and don't want to be bothered."

"But still, you know. Speaking of newlyweds, Julie and Ed had their first fight. Real bad one, too. She said she'd go home to her mother."

The man felt the hardness of the electric switch with his hand, rubbing his fingers back and

forth across it.

"Now!" he cried, in a joy and ecstasy, ripping his throat in the painful scream. He pushed the switch and at once the shutter swung open and a single shaft of sunlight fell from the roof in a solid straight line, round as a tree. Its colour was a hurting yellow-white, and they watched three dust motes float into its path and then float out into the darkness again.

"God," the man spoke through his pain. "God."

"The warmth," she thought, "the overpowering warmth, creeping with sharp tiny feet across my flesh."

"This is the moment," he said at last. The beam hung in the thick atmosphere, but did not spread out a hair of light to anything but its circle, so it appeared to be a white-hot column reaching forever into the upper worlds.

"Circles of light, black as night," she chanted.

"God," he answered.

"Tommy! Get that G.D. Bird out of here! I told you a thousand times you weren't allowed to have that pigeon in here. I told you you could have a parakeet or a canary, or something civilized."

"But I love her, Mommy!"

"Leave her here. The Hopkins will be by to pick you up in a minute." She waited until after he had been gone an hour. Then she cut the head of the pigeon off in one slice of the butcher knife. "Stupid bird," she said, "somebody ought to get rid of them all." She ran the body through the garbage disposal. "Too big for squab," she decided.

He watched the shutter swing shut, cutting off the light, and the house was sightless once more. The two curled up and slept, all emotion having been torn out of them.

"Julie, you want to come to the new house with me? I want to see if that couple is still there." Shirlee was nibbling at a liverwurst sandwich.

"I don't know, Shirlee, well, let me just put up my iron." Julie didn't want to go, but anything was better than ironing.

"Lookit there," said Valerie, pointing out of Harriet's window with her whiskey sour. "That pol Shirlee's goin' over to that there new house." Valerie watched them walk on. "Got to have my drink freshened," she smiled, and reached into Harriet's bar.

"I can't describe it, Helen, there just aren't words. Those two, two heathens asleep on the floor. The entire place was bare. I just couldn't believe it. And there they were. Wrapped together like animals." Shirlee sipped her drink. "Julie was with me. We told them what we thought about it, and you know what that man kept saying? Something about the sun. Think about that. Here we watch them doing God only knows what, and all he can think about is the sun. I don't know," she sneered. "His skin was like a china doll's, it was so white. I bet he's never been out in the daylight. And his wife, or whatever it is she was, she was just as bad. Long stringy hair, looked like it'd never been cut. I'm worried, Helen. Our neighborhood's too good for this to happen. My husband, he's a judge, you know, he'll hear about his." She sipped some more. "It won't do any good though, he never does anything." She looked up, "I didn't mean that, of course," she pleaded, "it's just that, well, he's so busy with his duties, and everything. If we want something done, we'll have to do it ourselves." She put down her glass.

"Want me to fill it up again?" asked Helen.

"Just put in a finger, or so," Shirlee sighed.

"Why did they come?" the woman asked.

"People always come. They can't leave us alone, ever. But we can't move, not . . . not now. This is the only spot, and besides," he stroked her long, wonderful hair, "we have no more money."

"We have each other," she smiled, and her teeth and eyes would have sparkled but there was no light to reflect.

"Valerie, do you have any wood left over from when your husband was building his shelves?" Shirlee asked the telephone. "You do? Fine. I'll send Jimmy over to get it." She watched Tommy twirling a feather in his fingers. "That's right, Tommy doesn't feel too well."

"Helen," started Harriet, "did Shirlee tell you about that new couple?"

"Yes," Helen said, "and I agree with her. I don't want those filthy hippies in here to corrupt our children. I think we should drive them out. On a rail if we have to." She popped a chocolate into her mouth. "You know, I never did like the ones with chewy centres. I remember when I was a girl they used to stick to my braces, and . . ."

"I tell you, Julie," said Shirlee, "I know what they are, what their filthy kind are. I remember stories my grandmother used to tell me."

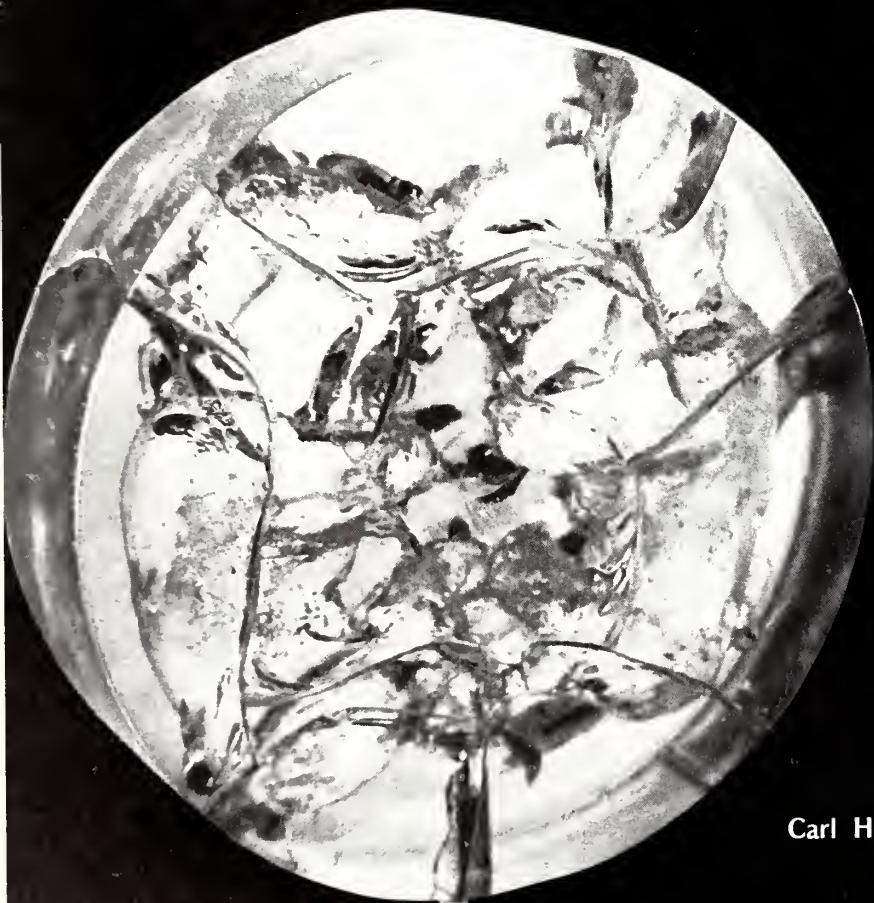
"Hold me tighter," the woman said, "I am afraid."

"Why can't they leave us alone?"

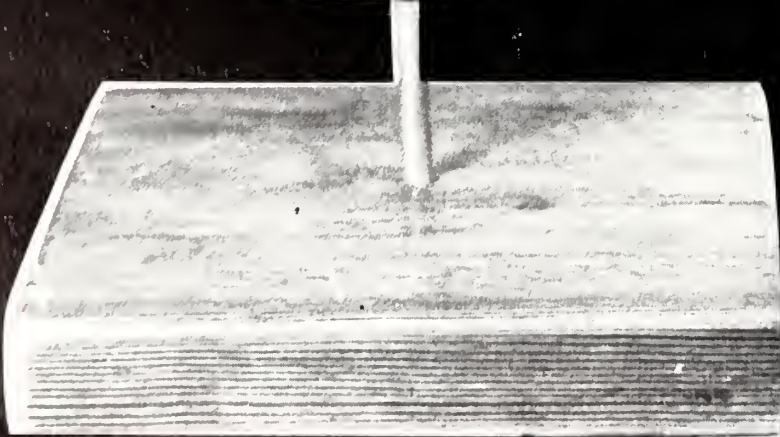
"Shirlee! Shirlee! Have you heard? The reason the police were here last night. That new couple! They were found with wooden stakes driven through their hearts!"

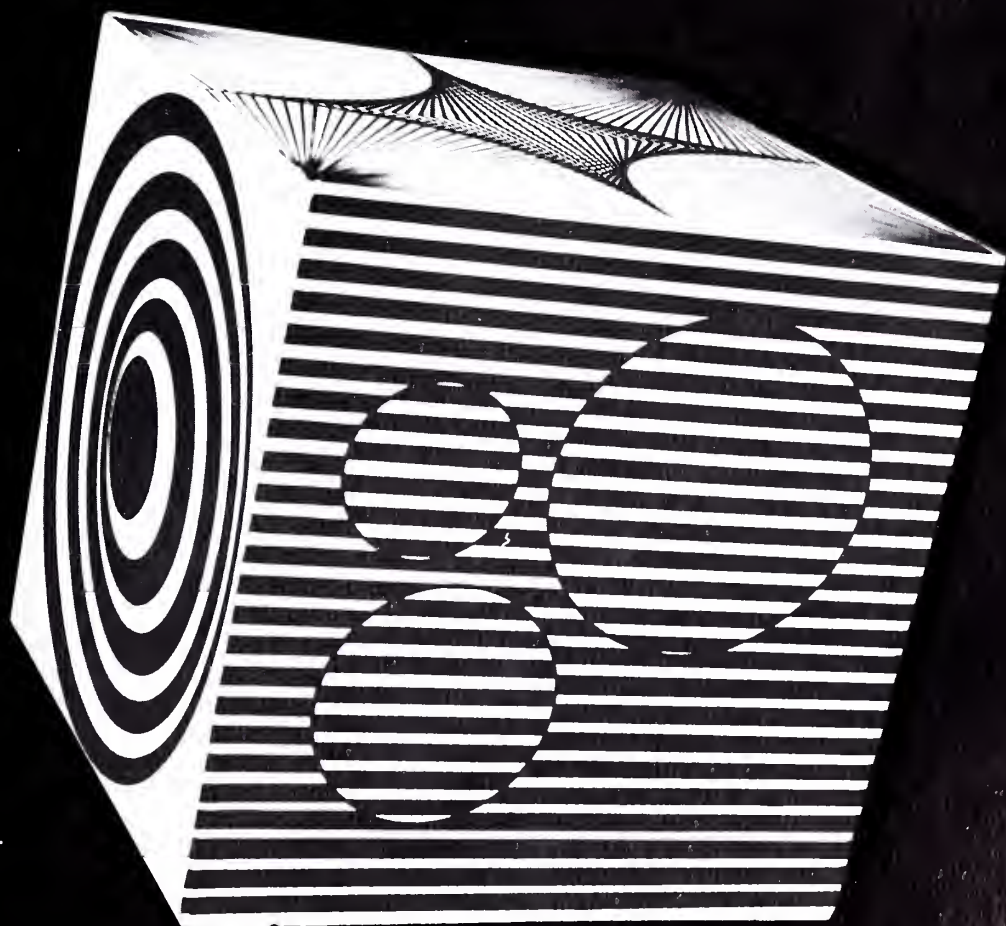
"Yes, Ethel," Shirlee said, "I heard."

Cheryl Calderin



Carl Hayden





Ron Sickmeier

Home, that's a place to be coming from
and going nowhere
Carrying memories on your back
And having only sad ones endure
Knowing that only people make you cry

DOUG DIAZ

pseudo dreams live
in the oriented souls
of stereotype junkies
who feed on sugar cubes
that nibble at their brain
to give them a feeling
of belonging in a dying
world where bloody soldiers
eat gut soup for lunch

pseudo dreams exist in
rose-tinted looking glasses
where fifty dollar hippies
are exhibited on a grand
pavillion called earth

pseudo dreams vanish
into a transparent air
where political musicians
play i love america tunes
in a concert hall filled
with yeah-yeah fans who
startle at the sound of
their own terrifying noises

JEANNE THOMAS





Steve Jacobs

I can sit and stare
out the window and
raise myself level with the top branches
of a tree, lush leaves,
sing with flurrying birds and
look down at gravity.

VICKI BALLENTINE

It was of utmost importance
to me today
to play with an ant

whose life is so easy
he need only worry about
escaping the movement of my hand.

Simplicity was as close as ever,
walking around on six legs,
with feelers moving rapidly.

Ants have
no problems,
I thought to myself.

Then I went back to my volume of
poetry,
suddenly bored with the ant.

If you wonder why life goes on,
it's because it hasn't stopped.

If you wonder why it hasn't stopped,
it's because it hasn't started.

If you wonder why it hasn't started,
keep wondering.

Funny how one day you decided to love me.
I had never thought of loving you before.
I had never much thought of you.
But all of a sudden, there love was.
And now,
Suddenly
it's back to how it was before.
Only backwards!
Now I think of you.
I think of loving you.
Funny how the days goodbye.

RUBEN BETANCOURT

"damn the end"
but he was shot anyway
and when the bullets
HIT him
he danced for a while
looking
like a
Yellowstone geyser
in red
then
he prayed
for that last
SHOT

i met her on a trip
to distant spain
my age permitting

i would have said
love
but love is an expensive
travel word
i travel light
from night to lonely
night
and someday
i will fly to spain
again

a dressing room
dwarf
hidden away in Cokes
looking up your dress
while you tried
on
the purple pants
he was glad
you didn't step on him

snow falls on a spoon
after the snow
the show begins
snowstorms have caused
blindness
in
the
past





Steve Jacobs

The old chair sits by the desk
except on those occasions when
there's too much company and
it gets carried into the

living room.

There it waits, uncomfortable
until the party ends and it can
go home, like the people, hoping
no one noticed it wasn't

French Provincial

As a single member
of the 3,000,000,000
do you feel like one
of the Zeros

People
are like boots
No matter how high the heels
They still get dung on the soul

Sitting bare assed on 10th street
with boyish blonde hair
and 12 freckles on her left knee

Aphrodite
was counting late model Fords
and multiplying them by two
she was
stared at
cursed
laughed at
someone even tried to convert her
to the Roman Catholic religion
When she explained she was a god
and all her friends were
too
and said she didn't need another one

The crowd jeered and a yellow mongrel
trotted over and lifted his leg
in her direction

and the urine was still running
down her back
When the cops came---and duly arrested her
for inciting to riot

SHAWN REAGAN

KATHY GIBSON

I cannot love a flower,
but that it wilts and dies.
And I cannot touch a person but
that he turns away
Which does not mean so much that
I am unloveable,
But only that I am a Lousy Gardener.

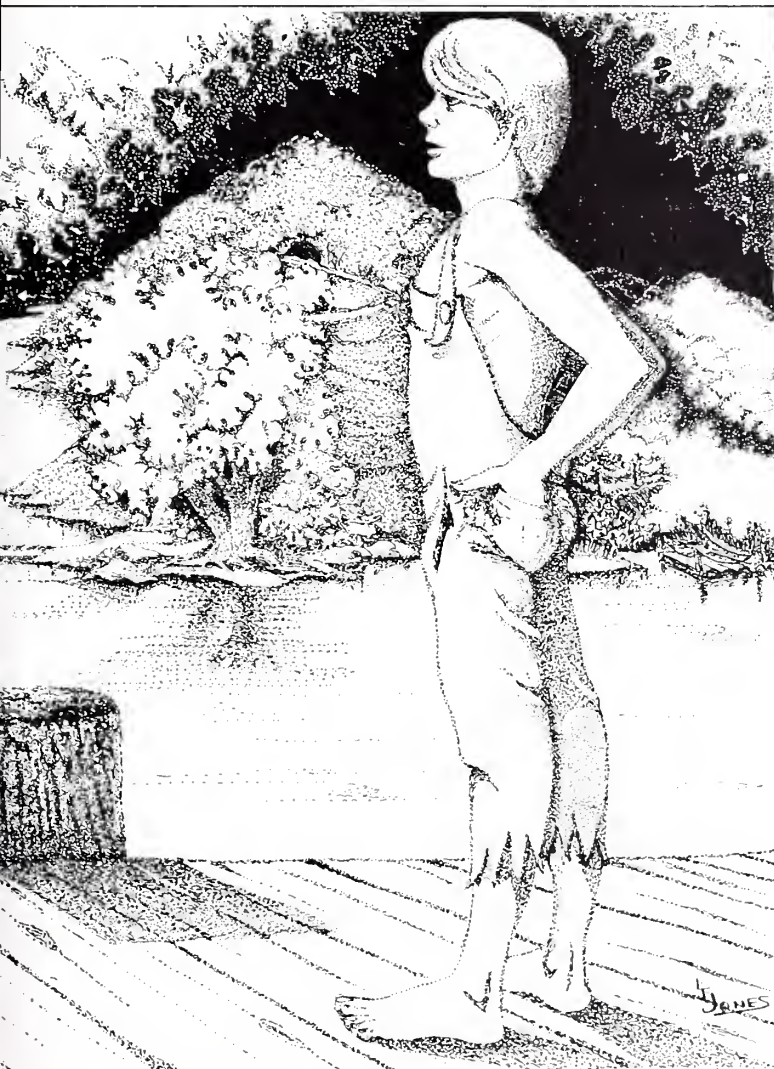
COME BACK

"COME BACK!!!"
Cried the Pauper,

"Come Back!!
Come Back!!"

But his single love was gone, leaving only
a mocking trail of laughter behind . . .
a sorry substitute for kisses.

CHYLENE CORBETT



I am weary of emptiness and plastic
facades,
I am tired of watching your faces melt
and reveal the rot within . . .
I tired and tired of betrayals
and being hung in the straps of
my forgivings.

The first indication that the base would be attacked came at 4:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon. At first, the warning went unheeded, but as the night grew near, tension built up in anticipation of a very lively evening.

Of course, the Group Intelligence Officer could be wrong. It would not be the first time Colonel Sommer had been wrong about a night's action. Thinking back though, Sergeant Larry Reid would have to give the old boy at least a 500 batting average. So, chances for a rocket attack on the Chu Lai Air Base tonight were pretty damn good, at least in Reid's mind.

It was time to quit working now though, so Reid tried to put his discomforting thoughts about the attack aside, at least for awhile. He put his tools away, closed the tire shop, and began the hike back to his hut. About halfway between the flight line and the living area Sergeant Carl Curry caught up with him. He was crossing the sprawling fuel pits next to the aircraft refueling area. Thick black hoses criss-crossed the sand like giant snakes. A Phantom was refueling, its jets idling with a groaning scream.

"You're a nice bastard, Reid. Don't wait up or anything," Curry said. He was yelling over the roar of the F-4 in the pits.

Curry's utilities were considerably dirtier than Reid's, greasier, and less green. In appearance at least, it would seem that he was either a much harder worker than his associate, or did not have as good a job. Actually, Curry just had never been a 'spit and polish' Marine, and simply never would be. In all matters in fact, Curry was less of a worrier than Reid.

"Don't give me any shit, Curry," Reid said, without looking at him. "Things are bad enough."

"Did you call Sommer?" Curry asked.

"Yes. He said we're going to catch hell."

"He did? Did he really, Lar? Hey, that's just great, Lar. Isn't that great, Lar?"

"You just joke around, Curry."

"Listen Lar, don't feel bad if you're not fearless like me. We all can't be fearless Marines like me, Lar. I'm fearless. You know that, Lar?"

"Yea, you're fearless," Reid said.

As they walked away from the flight line, and got closer to the living area, the sand was thicker and darker. They kicked up little swirls of dust as they walked. When they reached the huts, other Marines were preparing for the night. Some had towels tied around their waists as they walked to the showers. They carried their soap and shaving equipment in little bags, or in shower kits. Most of

by Joe Registrato

A Perfectly Lousy Day

em looked at the ground as they walked. It was getting late now, and Reid looked worriedly at the darkening sky.

They arrived at their hut and stripped the sweat-soaked utilities from their bodies. They both took a long drink from the cool water they kept in a small reefer in the hut. They switched on their fans and let the rushing air blow on their sun baked bodies.

After a little while, they wrapped towels around themselves and put their rubber sandals on. They stepped carefully out of the hut towards the towers, trying to walk on the firm ground. They took a cold shower and went back to their hut.

When they returned, the sun was almost down behind a heavy cloud cover. Grey smoke fit around the cliffs of a blue mountain facing the base. Reid looked at the ominous peaks and recalled Colonel Sommer's warning. He knew the day was about to end without a sunset. The clouds and smoke grew heavier as night approached, the darkness creeping around the country. The last daylight dimmed to a grey dusk that faded darker and darker, until the grey turned to black.

They went inside their hut. It was much cooler now that the sun was down, and the night air felt good coming through the screen. They powdered the sore spots on their bodies and the insides of their boots.

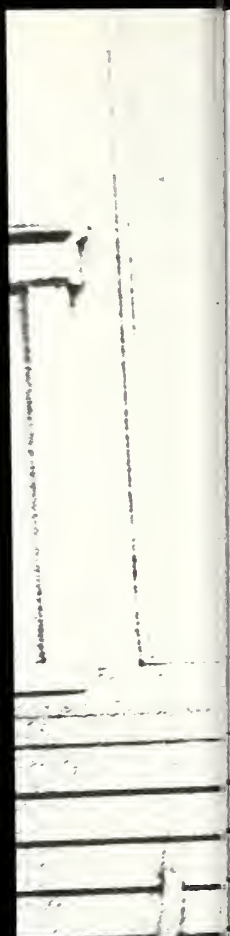
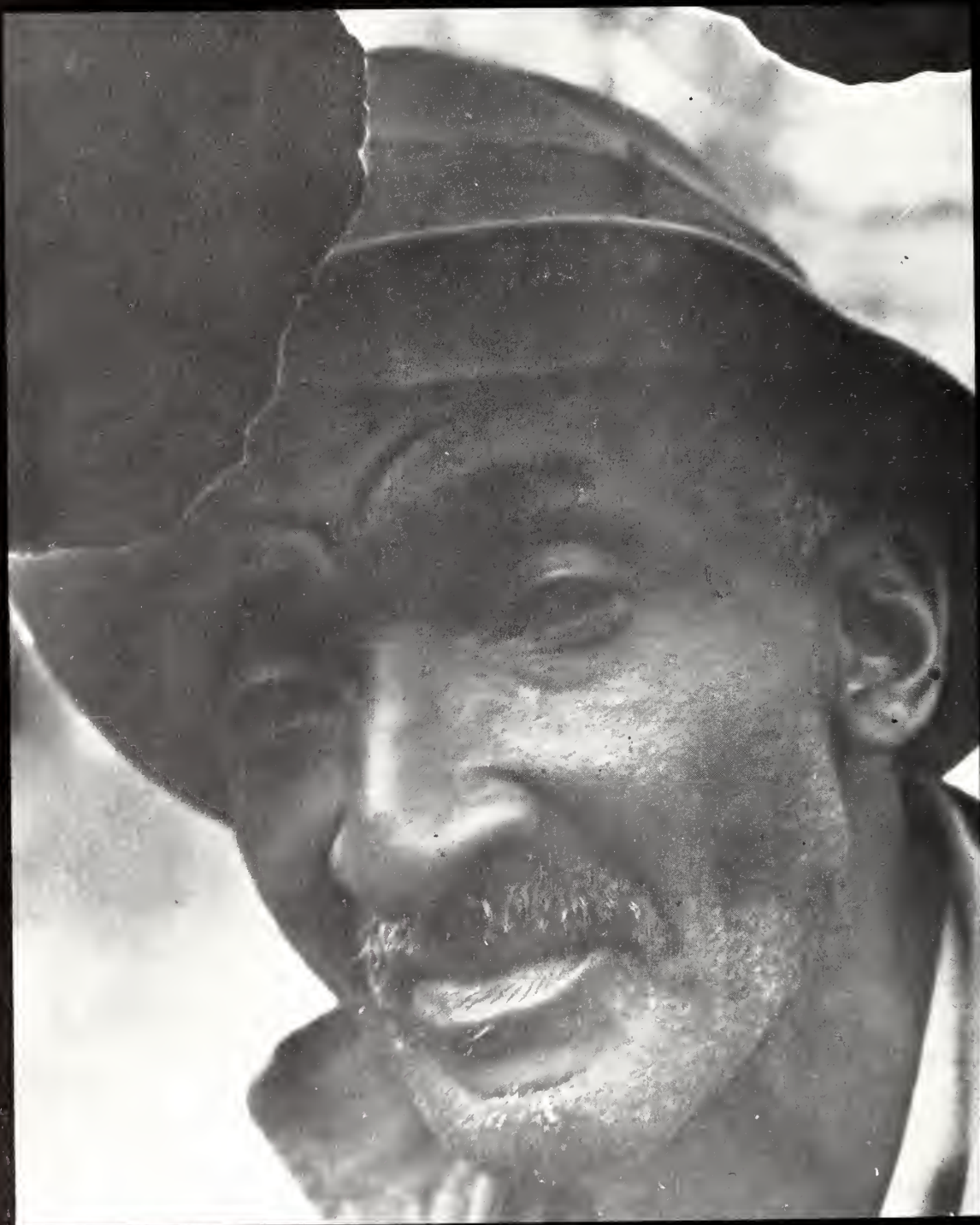
Reid wrote a letter to his wife. Curry could

never understand what Reid put in his daily letter, but was certain it must have become repetitious. There just wasn't that much to tell a person. Curry hardly ever wrote home. When he thought Reid was nearly finished, he suggested they go to the club. In the modern war, drink is cheap, and leisure time relatively plentiful. Reid agreed, and they left.

As the two came out of Sergeant's hut 5, the first rocket slammed into the living area. Its mighty explosion caused only minor damage to an empty hut. Its only effect on the troops was the blinding flash just before the unmistakable cracking roar of impact. The next rocket that roared into the hut area landed only 25 yards from where Reid and Curry were standing. Only an instant passed between the first rocket and the second; the harmless one, and the killer.

In the short interval, Reid and Curry almost realized they were in danger. They almost had time to react.

They were still on their feet at impact. The last thing they saw before they were shattered to pieces like plaster figurines was the spreading bright yellow flash as the rocket exploded.





Elizabeth Morrison



Blessed Be the Aged

by Chylene Corbett



Debbie Crittenden

"Renee . . ."

She knew what was coming, and hid lower in her chair, pulling her book over her face. "Renee!!" her mother said, her lips pursed firmly together.

"Ma, I don't wanna!" Renee whined, reluctantly lowering her book.

"Renee, I am getting very, very tired of this," her mother said, "very tired indeed. We go through this every time you have to go there."

"I don't want to go," Renee whined again, "I don't want to."

"I want you to stop this immediately. Now get up, and come with me. Grandpa's box is all packed and ready."

Renee sighed and climbed out of her chair wearily, closing the book with a bang.

She followed her mother to the bright, sunny kitchen, where a neatly packed cardboard box stood on the table. Her mother went to the box, fussing with the contents as she spoke. "I really don't see what all this fuss is about, Renee, you know how much your grandfather loves getting his box . . . and what harm does it do you? It's just once a week, and it only takes a few moments . . . but the way you act, you'd think I were sending you to, to jail or something . . ."

Why don't you go? Renee thought, staring at the corner of the table. Why don't you go? But she said nothing, just stared at the corner of the table, till it blurred and went out of focus.

" . . . now, I don't want you to loiter, and stay and talk to him, and tell him everything that has happened. Tell him about Susy and Mike getting on the Honor Roll, and about Rex's pups, though he'll forget it right after you've told him. But for heavensake, child, don't say anything about holidays, or vacations, or home . . . we don't want him here . . ." she added, and her lips tightened.

Renee stared at the corner of the table.

"Understand?" her mother said sharply. Renee nodded slowly, almost painfully. Her mother smiled. She gave her the box, and stood at the door watching as Renee walked slowly down the sidewalk, her feet dragging and scuffing.

"Don't loiter," her mother said sharply. Renee turned, looked at her and smiled wanly, then broke into an almost painfully quick walk. Her mother sighed, shook her head, and closed the door firmly. She didn't like sending Renee to the Home, didn't like it at all. But a child should know its grandparents, she reasoned, and besides, it was nice to have her obligation to her father carried out, for one more week. "I'll go next time," she said aloud. "I'll go, and save her the trouble." But even as she said it, she knew that she wouldn't.

Renee slowed again once she was out of sight of the house, and walked along as slowly as she

dared. She turned, and walked backwards, watching her feet, in the worn brown oxfords in a weird reverse motion. She liked to see where she had been, rather than where she was going. It made her feel like she had been somewhere . . . she turned around, looked up at the sky, so blue, and the clouds looked like big puffs of cotton, or the meringue her mother put on lemon pie. A wind ruffled her hair, and she shifted the box to her other arm. She walked slower and slower still, but she knew it would do no good.

She rounded the last corner, and there it was. She stood across the street from it and glowered at it. "Peaceful Rest Home," the sign tacked in the middle of the immaculate lawn said. She hated the building, so impersonal and stucco, so carefully blank and cheerful . . . she hated these last few steps, walking across the street and up the wide, pseudo-marble steps to the huge heavy double doors, the most foreboding part of the building. And most of all, most of all, she hated opening those doors . . . she took a last deep breath of fresh, sweet air, and went inside.

She got as far as the elevator before she had to exhale, and draw into her lungs the odor of age. It was a horrible smell, of stale urine and rancid sachet, of old spice aftershave and a linen closet never opened. It was the smell of dank earth and musty tombs, the sour smell of breath and old worn clothing. She hated it . . . it stuck in her throat and seemed to draw the youth from her limbs, till she felt as old as her grandfather . . .

The elevator stopped, the doors slid open. She stepped inside and rode to the top. They slid open again, and she got out. She stood in the women's hall, painted a soft baby blue that contrasted cruelly with the faded print dresses and sallow complexions of the old women who wandered here and there, or who stood staring vacantly into the corridor from their blank, empty rooms. "Candy?" a shriveled old woman said, holding out her gnarled hands. "Candy?" she asked, her running eyes blinking hopefully.

"No, no candy," Renee whispered.

"Candy . . . candy . . ." the old woman echoed vacantly, and smiled, revealing long yellowed teeth. Sickened, Renee moved on to the men's ward.

She moved through the hall, trying hard not to look at the waiths moving from there to there . . . it seemed to her that their eyes followed her, devoured her, almost hungrily, as if they would draw her youth into themselves . . . she shuddered and hurried faster.

Her grandfather's room was open, and she went inside. He stood at the window, peering out peevishly, his body trembling, whether in rage or eagerness, she couldn't tell.

"Hello, grandfather," she said evenly, not

bothering to inject a false note of happiness into her voice. He turned and blinked at her.

"I brought you your box," she said. She walked forward and put it into his hands. He sat down on the bed, and looked up at her vacantly, then began pawing absently through the contents.

"Mother is well, and so is father, and Rex had puppies, and Susy and Mike got on the Honor Roll and everyone else is okay..." She blurted, and edged towards the door. "Goodbye, grandfather..." she said hesitantly. He stopped his pawing, and stared at her, blinking and quivering. "Jimmy..." he said, "you didn't tell me about Jimmy. I want to know about Jimmy..."

She closed her eyes and swallowed. No use to tell him Jimmy, his son, had died forty years ago... no use at all. She opened her eyes and smiled.

"Jimmy is well, grandfather," she said carefully. "He has a pony cart now, with three little white ponies. He has six German shepherds, too, and when he rides down the sidewalk in his little pony cart, the other children laugh and run to him. They dance around him and beg him for rides, but he knows they'll only whip his beautiful little ponies, so he never lets anyone but himself drive his ponies. And sometimes, when he doesn't want to ride on his pony cart, he goes for long walks."

"Walks... here?" the old man quavered, his eyes feverishly bright. "In the woods, grandfather, way out in the woods. And he walks and walks, with the trees like a tent above him, and the air all heavy and sweet and spicy with the smell of the fresh clean water and the violets and the ferns, so lovely."

The old man sniffed tentatively, as if he could smell the violets and the fresh, sweet air.

"And then he walks across the log bridge. He feels the bark rough on his bare feet, rough and warm like the back of a big old alligator, and he walks across it. The dark water rushes underneath him, and he walks slowly, but he isn't afraid. He isn't afraid at all, because he is young and strong, and he knows he won't fall."

"... Won't fall..." her grandfather whispered.

"When he's on the other side, there are fields all around, and he runs... he runs and runs, because he is young and loves to run, because he is strong and he knows that he is strong."

"Running... running..." the old man stared into space, into the past. "And when he comes to the pond, he stops and dances around it, watching his reflection jumping in the water, because it is so funny. Then, he skips rocks on the water... one, two, three, four. He made four skips today."

Her grandfather sat up, his face beaming, his

eyes bright and shining. "Four? I made four skips today" he quavered.

"Yes, Jimmy, you made four skips today. And now, you are going exploring, because you like to explore... you are going deeper and deeper into the fields. You see a herd of cows and you run at them, screaming and hollering, because you like to see them trying to run, ambling along on their fat ugly carcasses..."

"Move, you ole cows... move..." he whispered.

She glanced at the alarm clock on her grandfather's dresser, and then went over and kissed him on his parchment-wrinkled cheek... he didn't move, and probably never noticed she was leaving... his eyes were closed, and his lips worked fitfully, an expression of joy on his withered features. She tiptoed out, but just before she closed the door, she looked back and smiled, a sharp, cruel, little smile. "Goodbye, Jimmy," she said, and closed the door gently...

Jimmy was running, running, faster and faster, his strong, young legs moving in beautiful rhythm, his lungs filling and emptying with sweet, clean air, tinged with the spicy-sweet smell of violets and ferns... and he was running... running... faster and faster leaping over logs and fences, leaping to the sky and down again... running, running... there was a wall ahead... a wall so tall and high that no body had ever jumped it... but he could... he knew he could... he, Jimmy, could jump over the wall... he could, he could... he was running, running, the wall was getting closer and closer and closer... he could jump it, he could get over it, if only — if only the ground and sky would stop shaking so... would stop shaking so... then he realized that someone was shaking him...

"Mr. Melvers... Mr. Melvers..."

"No," he cried petulantly. "NO!" He opened his eyes, and stared at the incredibly old nurse in front of him, her wrinkled face wreathed in smiles, a white cap sitting on her grey-streaked hair. She held a tray.

"It's time for lunch, Mr. Melvers," she said brightly. He held out his hands stupidly to take it, and then he saw his hands... his incredibly old and gnarled work-worn hands...

The nurse came out of his room, and went to the kitchen. "That poor Mr. Melvers," she said with professional sympathy to Betty Jean. "He must love his little granddaughter very much... it always takes him so long to get over it after she leaves..."

And they both listened, not really hearing, the old man's tortured, dry-coughing sobs...

Haiku

Small things of the past
Cast giant reflections in
The soul's sentiment.

A kiss is just the
Pressing of lips, but love is
The pressing of souls.

The sun is soaking
Up the day, leaving flecks of
Blood in Evening sky.

Poor gentle Satan,
Old Adam got the apple,
But you got the core.

A poet folded an idea
Into a paper airplane
And sent it into the air,
Watching as it gusted
Across clouds and small birds
Until it fell
Like a tired raindrop into
A pig sty,
Where a hog happily
Tucked it away,
Which only goes to show
That everything is appreciated
Somewhere.

There were two curls
That lived in fear
Of a shiny pair of scissors,
From Boston,
(One of the original Yankee Clippers)
Until one suggested
That they tie a bell around
The scissors handles,
But that had already been done,
And curls like to be different,
So they just kept growing,
And the scissors kept cutting,
Until they wore out,
And the curls laughed and
Laughed,
And the
Man that owned the
Scalp where the curls lived
Went
Bald.

TERRY TAFOYA

Golden Shores

by Terry Tafoya

Monroe sat in the seat next to Stan. "My father was turned down for a home in Golden Shores," he sighed.

"It wasn't because of money," Stan said, with just a hint of an edge.

"No, not money."

"Just how much is he worth now?"

"About three million."

"About three million," he laughed, "mine makes \$7,000 a year."

"Your father teaches, doesn't he?"

"English. Just why was your family turned down?"

"We're not upper-upper class. My father earned his money the hard way. He's not like one of those who just had a fortune fall in his lap."

"The way it will fall into yours," Stan filled in. There was no emotion in his voice, but then there rarely was.

"I guess I'm just a snob about snobs."

"Golden Shores meant a lot to your father, didn't it?"

"It was sort of a goal . . . you know, the thing a young man dreams about while cashing a weekly pay check."

"Who's in charge of selling to people; the real-estate man."

"I think his name is Cromstock, or Cromwell, something like that."

"Let's go see him."

"We're hardly dressed for that," he smirked.

"It doesn't matter."

They walked, because young people enjoy walking, they like the feel of hard sun-light and the push of wind against their faces. They came to the office of Golden Shores, a tall, cold building of glass and stone, far removed from the Shores themselves.

"Have you ever seen the property?" Stan asked.

"Yes, we drove through it. They were very nice to us until they found out that we weren't established. It's like another land — a country of kings and queens."

"And whiskey makers." Stan watched Monroe blush.

"This is the office," Monroe pointed to a large oak door, seemingly barred even against Time.

"Just a door . . . a barrier that keeps your father from what he wants."

"It's not just the door."

"No, it's life and the system, the American way, the decadent imperialistic vein. It's every tired cliché that books, computers and newspapers can turn out on their tripewriters," he opened the door, "and your father himself."

"May I help you?" asked the stunned secretary. She had never seen anyone that was not dressed in a business suit or a Vogue creation before.

"We came to see Mr. Cromstock," replied Stan, coldly, never taking his eye off the gold let-

ring on another oaken door. He walked straight to it, ignoring the secretary as though she were one of the other greek statues that cluttered the office. Monroe followed him like a child, unbelieving, yet trying to believe.

Stan didn't knock. He walked in. "Mr. Cromwell, you don't know me, I'm Mr. Monroe's other son." He allowed himself a flash smile, showing one of his teeth; he didn't offer his hand. But when neither did Mr. Cromstock.

"Didn't my secretary . . ."

"Your secretary did nothing. Which seems to be your business habit."

Stan sat.

Cromwell fell into his chair, like a balloon losing air. He was fat and fifty, corrupt with the money that had existed in his family for years.

"I'll come right to the point, my dear Mr. Cromwell," Stan leered. "My family wants to live in Golden Shores, though I can't imagine why. I want the property and at the price you talked about to my father." He looked Cromwell in his small, green eyes. "I want it now."

"I don't understand . . ."

"That's fairly obvious. I am Stan Monroe, a genius. I helped built my father's fortune, and I intend to help him now. You see, Mr. Cromwell, this is what I do best. Handle people." He leered again.

"This is unheard of, why I . . ."

"That's your map of Golden Shores, isn't it?" He asked, pointing to the North wall. "The perfect city-within-a-city. That's your slogan, I believe."

Cromwell nodded dumbly.

"May I ask who owns the land surrounding . . .?"

"The city, they have a contract . . ."

"Correction, they may have a contract. There are three lawyers waiting for me to call them. They just need my father's signature on a couple of papers. Then the land belongs to us." He allowed a tooth to show.

"I, I . . ."

"I will explain it to you. The land is so beautiful in the area, and yet denied to so many, Mr. Cromstock. And the entire land region is zoned for building."

"What are you getting at!"

"Low-cost housing, child, living quarters for starving people, the government will help too," he laughed wickedly. "And how about a home for unwed mothers of minority groups? Happy children of all races playing on the edge of Golden Shores. At last you'll achieve the ultimate for the perfect city-within-a-city. I'm going to build you a dream. Do you know what it will be like. Walling in

Golden Shores with a ghetto."

Someone had let all the air out of Mr. Cromstock.

"You may call my father at precisely three o'clock, Mr. Cromstock." He did not smile this time. "He does not like people to be late." Stan watched the perspiration drip down the older man's many chins, like streams of warm water dragging their way across a dry, sterile earth.

He held the door open for Monroe, and waved to the secretary, slamming the heavy door behind them.

"I don't believe it," Monroe said, and said again.

"Call your father, and let him know what's about to happen. Don't mention my name — I'm not overly proud of what I did."

Stan looked at the snowflake thin strands of a spider web, rubbing them so gently they stretched but didn't break. "People are such fools," he told the wind, but Monroe heard.

"Why?" Monroe asked, for he was the younger and always asked.

"They want so badly to believe." He smiled. "But then, truth is just something that a majority believes in. That's what makes it real."

"Is that how you threatened Cromstock?"

"Monroe," Stan looked a mole under the other's eye, "I didn't threaten the man. He threatened himself. He blackmailed himself with all the petty fears, prejudices and hate practices he had hoarded over a life time. He didn't see a ruthless young person in his office. He saw his reflection."

"But it worked, that's what matters."

"Yes, it worked, exposing the worthlessness of it all. I brought myself down to their level. That's what matters. I wallowed in the dirt right next to him, but then that's what friends are for." He smiled into the web.

"That isn't true."

"Too true. All white grubs in a rotten log of life."

"You're so bitter."

"Not bitter. Resigned. Why did your father . . . I can answer that myself. I pity you, for you're going to have to live in Golden Shores, comfortably locked within guarded electric gates so that no riff-raff gets in. I wonder, will they censor the news for you, too? They have their own paper, you know."

"But my father is —"

"Happy. And that's important, for every life must have at least one goal accomplished." He broke the web. "Even if someone else accomplishes it for him."



Chylene Corbett

John Stanbrook III



"Ten bucks says you don't get one."

"You got a bet, pal. I've been waiting all year for this."

The two men followed a creek for another mile or so, looking for an appropriate campsite.

"How about that rise on the left?"

Jack Harris pointed to a gentle slope. Glancing momentarily, his friend said, "O.K., looks good, but I don't see any deer waiting for us."

Sun scorched grass covered the hill, and Jack could see a few trees on it through the early morning darkness. Stan Mallo plowed the jeep through the heavy grass toward the top of the hill. The jeep's motor was the only sound that disturbed the quiet morning air. Stan switched off the ignition when they reached the crest.

"I think you did something right for once, Jack. This spot looks good."

"Sure as hell does," said Jack.

Jack surveyed the surrounding countryside. At the bottom of the hill, to their right, a thick growth of trees covered the path of a small stream. They had planned carefully to be near the water source and their chosen site was perfect. Behind

them was the hilly, deer infested forests of southern California.

"Let's set up and get started. It's getting late," Stan said.

They gathered shelter halves, cooking utensils, and other camp equipment from the back of the jeep. The sun would be up soon and they would be wise to have a tent ready. October in this part of the country could be treacherously hot. They went about preparing the equipment quickly, efficiently, practiced.

"That's about it, Jack. You finish up, I want to check the rifles. I didn't get a chance to look at them yesterday."

"O.K., I'll go down and get some water."

Jack picked up four canteens and started toward the stream at the bottom of the hill. The sun was visible on the horizon now, but its rays had not yet penetrated the trees that hung over the stream. It was dark and damp near its edge. Jack sat down on a large rock and began filling the canteens. When he finished, he put the canteens down next to him and stared across the narrow stream. The sounds of the swirling current as it rushed past

THE HUNTER

by Joe Registrato

him had a hypnotizing effect. He didn't realize how long he had been there.

"Hey! You gonna stay down here all day?"

Stan's voice awakened him from the spell.

"Sorry, Stan. I was daydreaming, I guess."

"Daydreaming! What a time to be daydreaming. A zillion and one deer out there, and you're daydreaming."

They both stared across the stream for a minute.

"You going to get one this year, Jack?" Stan said.

"No doubt about it. This is it. I can feel it."

"You felt it last year, too. The year before that you were still a little shaky, but last year you felt it. Now this year you can feel it again. We'll see."

All the lessons Stan had given Jack on the proper method of making a kill were to no avail. For five years the pair had been coming to the California mountains to hunt. Jack was yet to get his first deer.

"You want to make the wager fifteen instead of ten?" Jack said confidently.

"Let's forget about it for now. If we're going to bring home any meat at all, we better get started."

They picked up the canteens and started back up the hill. When they reached the top, Stan reached into the jeep and brought out the rifles.

"Here you go, Jack. I wish you all the best."

Silently the hunters made their way into the rich forests. Jack felt the tenseness building up in him until he was shaking all over. An hour after they began their trek, Jack saw a motion in the bush ahead of them.

"I think — —" Jack began to whisper, but Stan cut him off. He put his finger to his lips.

They squatted and watched a large buck walk across their path. It was mating season for the proud mule deer, and the usually cautious bucks sometimes got a little careless. This one did.

The big male was courting a doe directly ahead of the two men on the edge of a small clearing, no

more than 500 yards from them. Leisurely, the two deer nibbled on a nearby branch. The hunters moved closer.

"I'll take the buck. You get the doe," Stan said.

Jack looked up at his friend, and then back at the two animals. "O.K.," he said.

They closed the distance between them and the deer. 400 yards, 300, 250. They knelt on the dry ground slowly, carefully. Jack watched Stan bring the rifle to his face before he did the same. He heard Stan whisper, "Ready, one-two-three."

The shots rang through the air with a thunderous echo, coming back again and again in Jack's ears. He watched the doe leap frantically in the air, and run away into the woods. Stan stood up and looked at the buck lying dead on the ground.

"Well, we got one," Stan said.

They trotted toward the slain animal.

"What happened, close your eye again?"

"I don't know. I guess I'll never learn."

They stood over the dead deer and looked at the wound.

"Perfect hit," Stan said. "I'll swear by this rifle."

Jack knelt next to the animal and inspected the fatal wound more closely.

"Good shot, Stan," Jack said.

Stan noticed a twinge of frustration in Jack's voice. "Don't let it worry you, Jack. You'll get one yet."

"Sure, Stan, sure."

"I'll get the jeep," Stan said. "Be right back."

Stan leaned his rifle against a tree, and started back to the camp. Jack looked closely at the deer, and then watched his friend until he disappeared. He studied the dead animal's thick neck, and proud antlers.

Carefully avoiding the spilled blood, he wrapped both arms around the buck's neck. Slowly at first, gradually intensifying, ignoring the blood, squeezing the animal more tightly, lovingly, out of control, Jack cried.

And cried.

When people ask me what I'll do for a living
I say I'll probably write sum poetry
& maybe pick some cheeries in the summer
& they say —

O that's nice
but what
will
you
do
for
a living?

to be excommunicated

i sleepwalk through the woods
of my youth where once,
annointed with blessed sunlight,
i built my tabernacle
adorned with pine boughs and
there worshipped her
like some naked Adam.
from the hidden pulpits.
i heard the silent sermon
while the choir circled and
sang above the pine spires.
i stood on the great granite boulder
that was once my sacred altar
amidst the briar and honeysuckle
and there whispered
a long-forgotten prayer.
awakening from my sleepwalk prayers
to the darkening fireplace
woods of this day,
i find the mud and moss of the
forest floor no longer imprinted
by my naked toes:
i am excommunicated by the thickness
of my synthetic leather sole.

to drop out
is a quiet crime.
i'm sorry for the seeking
of satisfaction
away from the living.
i'm sorry for the fancy twigs
in your sifter,
the smallest weeds
put to bed,
burnt in white.

tongue rattling
 then dropping grotesquely long

peeling oranges
 at 23
 sitting on park benches at 63

eyes are not to be looked at
do not look at eyes
they do not wrinkle
 like flesh

tongue orange eyes

i am the toad
the green warty load
i squat on fat freaky legs
and feed on green furry bugs
awaiting quietly
the kiss
of a fairy princess

leaving him off we
traveled north
the road was wide
& the sky
the color of wet sand
he waved
a black bug getting
small in the mirror
holding his side
& sleeping bag
i wonder if he was
who he said he was
or were they just
hole made in his hands
by the
spiny jack of time —

EMILIO MASSARO

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WHAT'S GOOD HERE

by BILL JACQUES

Cheryle was always scared of Dwight. She could remember all of the intelligent things he had to say, all the wonderful moves he ever made, and all the wonderful feelings he'd always share. Feelings she could never touch. That's what really scared her. Everytime she saw him it was the same, a terribly strange feeling would come over her as if everything she thought she was, wasn't really anything at all! It was as if he could see right through her, into her, and she really didn't want to expose what she didn't know herself.

Other girls had talked about him very strangely. One of his ex-girlfriends described him as a "totally honest person." Another one claimed he was "the devil." One thing was consistent, they both agreed he could not be figured out. Other comments were more or less the same, "he's got a nice personality," or "I wonder what he's trying to do with his life." These would usually follow a communal reading into his high school yearbook in which he would be passed by

after a matter of two seconds.

It was different today. Cheryle was talking to an old friend when he walked in and spotted her immediately.

He sat next to them and said, "Hello!"

"Wow, how are you?" asked Cheryle.

"Good."

There was silence. Cheryle had to speak with him and decided to invite him along to move to the other side of the cafeteria where she could get some food.

"I'm gonna get something to eat, wanna come?" Cheryle inquired while Dwight began to nod his head.

Walking with him was anticlimatic. He said nothing, just walked and smiled.

"What's good here?"

"Grilled cheese."

"Is it cheap?" Cheryle wanted to know.

"It's thirty-five cents."

Nothing else. That's all he said. What was the matter?

"Dwight?"

"Yes."

"Are you happy?"

"That's an unfair question."

"No, really, . . . are you happy?"

"Well, . . . I guess I'm not, I mean, . . . shit that's an awful question."

She leveled, "It's something about you . . . that makes me feel as though you hate me." Dwight looked angry when she said that.

"That's not right!" Dwight shouted back at the lecturer. "You've got your logic fouled up, you keep saying revolution, revolution . . . when you really don't know what a revolution is!"

A refrain of boos and hisses emerged from the audience.

"Let me" The noise was drowning him. It subsided. "Let me explain," he continued. He had their attention. "You keep shouting 'kill the pigs' when the real fact is we are the ones who are strengthening them. We are trying to eliminate violence with violence, only we are doing it with different values. If, and I say IF we were really proud of our country, we wouldn't have the pigs in the first place. We would defend what we had, but we insist on believing we have nothing! Who the hell cares any more?! That's why this so-called 'revolution' of ours is going to fail . . . we don't even think we are fighting for anything! We are giving THEM more power by strengthening THEIR reasons for THEIR acts. If the pigs' only job was to stand on a street corner some place, then he would have only a fraction of the power he has today, but who do you call when there's a man walking the streets and threatening to kill you? You call on the pigs, the government, the

UNITED STATES OF AMERIKA! You, we all
re giving them power not taking from it!!” The
fence and Dwight continued. “Point two . . . about
three years ago there were a few, A FEW people who
ere strange and different. There were a few people
ho were forced to live together in communes just to
urvive! Now look at all there are out there,” Dwight
ointed to the rear of the theater as if his finger
adowed the world. “You people may call that sup-
ort, you people may call that security, but I call it
ullshit! Anybody can grow their hair long. Any-
ody can do acid. Grass is a household word! I think
e have created our own Great Society!!!”

There was silence. The kind of silence which
emed to last forever.

Cheryle stared at him and almost began to cry.
Why do you act the way you do?” she desperately
ked turning to her grilled cheese which now lay on
e counter. “Why?”

“I don’t think anyone knows the answer,”
wight responded to Mike. “If he really wanted to
e he could have taken a gun and shot himself. It
ould have been as easy as that.”

“Are you suggesting attention?” asked Mike as
e took another hit off his fat number.

“I’m in no position to suggest anything! All I
now is that Tom is a very intelligent friend. Some-
mes, . . . I imagine, . . . people do things like that for
asons they really don’t want to face up to them-
selves. Tom was full of hatred! He hated just about
everything and everyone including himself,
ou’ve got to find some type of outlet.”

The phone sprang to life and Mike answered it
n its first ring.

“Hello? . . . Yeah, They said
at? Okay, . . . Yeah I understand, . . . oh
uzanne, . . . thanks, goodbye.” Click.

Mike looked at Dwight. “He’s out of critical and
ey say he’s gonna live!” Mike announced.

“That’s good I guess,” responded Dwight.

“How would it of affected you if he died?”
ked Mike.

“I don’t know.”

Cheryle took the sandwich and walked quickly
o the cash register. Before the cashier had a chance
o ring up the sum Cheryle placed the 36¢ in her hand
nd walked over to a table. Dwight sat beside her.

“I’m sorry, I mean I’m really sorry.”

The voice on the other end of the line was very
aint and proceeded very slowly. “How did it
appen?”

“We still don’t know for sure, we think they
obbed her at first, . . . or tried to rob her, . . . at least
hat’s what we’ve been told by the police.”

“ . . . when?”

“Early this morning they say.” Dwight was hold-

ing the phone very close to his ear but could barely
hear Mrs. Toben. Scattered around him were multi-
tudes of press people keeping completely silent.
There was a burst of tears, . . the phone made a noise
as if it were dropped, . .

“Who am I speaking to and what the hell is go-
ing on?” he yelled.

“Mr. Toben, this is Dwight.”

“Yes??”

“It’s about Liza, . . . she was found dead this
morning in her tent.”

There was a long and awestrking pause which
was bursted to pieces after five seconds.

“What??”

“The police, they found the people who are re-
sponsible,

“Where the hell were YOU?? You said . . You
said everything would be alright. I knew I shouldn’t
have trusted you or any of your faggot
friends!

“I was in the audience when it hap . . .”

“You killed her! You and your culture!! You
murdered my daughter!”

Dwight hung up and ran down the control tower
at the reconverted speedway. When he reached the
bottom he looked at all the freaks and decided there
was nowhere he could hide. Nowhere. Dave walked
towards him and stared at him as they walked to-
wards the van. In the rear Dwight heard the rumbling
of amplified music as he stammered through the mud.
They passed a freak selling “Give Peace A Chance”
buttons and “Free Huey Newton” tee shirts. Along
the way others would steadily chant, “Lel Es Dee
twenty-five cents” and “Mescce one dollar.”

Dwight looked at Dave and said, “Let’s go
home, this whole scene is filled with strichnine.”

“I know.” Cheryle replied. “I’m sorry, It’s
me, . . . not you, . . me.”

“What’ya mean?” ask Dwight.

Cheryle knew she wouldn’t touch him. Ever.

“I mean, well . . .” She turned to the cheese and
licked the edges first. “Well, . . . you’re different. I
don’t really think you hate me.” She smiled and the
sandwich was finished off in silence between the two.

After she had completed, Dwight looked at her
and said, “Since you’ve been gone I’ve had a lot of
experiences and learned a lot of things.”

She was listening.

“However, one thing I think I have learned that
is really important. In order to love someone. I mean
REALLY love someone, you have to lower yourself
to where they are, not where you think they should
be. One day I’ll be able to do that, until then I can
only talk. I want you to know that I never could do
that. I want you to remember that.”

Cheryle smiled and answered, “I will.”

The sun reflected white light
from his hair as he snapped his head,
moving so electric he flashed
the air around him charged
with the heat of the singer
or the light of the song.

And the audience
was the mercury behind his glass -
he laughed as you studied
the light he shed, the patterns
he gave
Dream or mirage,
he was a sandman singer of sorts
who produced the songs by sleight-of-hand.

but where did he snatch them, and why?

JANIS MARA

after you left my house that wednesday afternoon
I shivered
 down on my knees
 in front of the kitchen stove
 like a beggar in a wealthy church
 kneeling at the communion rail
in supplication
after you left me that wednesday after noon

the landlord
was a bald man
who beamed at me
as he fed
his kaliedeoscope of cats
who blurred in the sunlight
fighting for the food

the landlord
said "we have a regular museum here"
pointing to his house
Ancient curios and clocks. . . .
i wonder how he felt
when i screamed myself outdoors
after he tried to rape me

for R. A.

if i could live by candlelight this night
moving muffled by heavy moon-dark air,
i would fling nets of song-spells
like smoke spirals over flame
mingling with the breadth of night;
i would walk adorned with black night ardor.
but you are the catch that tears my net
on the forked tip of candle flame
and the shadows wave a warning,
the spell sings too clear a pattern. . .
its outline would be a scar next morning

Hitch-hiking from Arcadia

it's a death-watch night and there's no answer
coming from the woods, it's a vacuum
empty of sound or motion, not even a threat
to affirm my presence
in the existance of the highway
Shuffling through my life like a pack of cards. . . .
I lived the game of solitaire,
took no chances, and it ended in an empty draw.

the pace of my suicide has slowed
marked by the metronome of my steps. . . .
At last I recognize the partner who is walking by my side.
But I can get back on the road if I can only hitch a ride.



HITCH-HIKING IN THE COUNTRY

By STUART HOPEN

This is the story of a ghost named Phillip who went wandering to find himself, a task which he never accomplished in his own life time. He put too much emphasis on preparing for death, so that a good many years after he had died, there seemed to be nothing left for him to do. All he wanted was something that would amuse him. So there he stood on the edge of a road, wearing the tattered velvet he had been buried in. His face was like a dusty skull. He looked very much like a scarecrow seeking transportation - take me where there are some crows. There are no crows in a graveyard. Only maggots.

He was far from civilization. The road he was on was just a ribbon twisting and curving, cutting deep through the forest. The trees on both sides were so tall and thick that the sun could not come through. He felt lazy and contemplative. He relaxed and sang an old Steven Foster song that went, "Gone are the days when my heart was young and gay. Gone are the friends and the cotton fields away." Who else could sing a song like that and feel it? Only another ghost, but Phillip is the only ghost in this story. Phillip went on singing about the angels' voices, and how his head is hanging low.

Death had really come as a blessing to Phillip. He was free forever of all responsibility, which is really what he hated and feared most in his life. He could move around until he found something to make him happy. It was beautiful country he was traveling in. In the distance were the mountains, hazy and blue. He could reflect on his life and get an objective overview of it. His life was over.

the second part

The first person to pick Phillip up drove a Frankenstein car - that is to say that the owner took parts from dead cars and put them together to create a monster. The hood rattled as if it was full of skele-

tons dancing and fighting with one another. The driver was the kind of middle-aged farmer who prided himself on his ability to strike matches on his beard and open Coca-cola with his teeth. The man was like iron, strong, quiet, and afraid of rusting. The car made noises like an orchestra comprised of blacksmiths, glass blowers, and dentists' drills being conducted by Krist of Pendereski and Eugene Ormandy fighting for the baton. The only comment which the iron farmer made during the entire ride was, "You've got to treat this car like an old mule. When you buy a young mule, you take good care of it, and try not to work it too hard, so it will last you a long time. But when that mule gets old, and you know that it won't last long anyway, you work it as hard as you can, 'cause you know it might drop dead on you any minute any way."

The trees and the hillsides passed in a blur. Phillip and the iron farmer passed beautiful ancient hovels with boards popping loose, and rotted shingles. They passed the wrinkled ancients who lived in the shacks, working men whose muscles had turned to bags of water, sitting with their fat toothless wives. Their eyes were patriotic, red, white, and blue.

Sometimes in the middle of an open field, where there was nothing else around, there would be a sign advertising old bottles, or old books. It was almost like the principal virtue of any object was age. The iron farmer had said that the time to work a mule was when the mule got old. It was at an antique bottle shop that the iron farmer parted from Phillip.

"What the hell do you want in a bottle shop?" asked the Iron Farmer. "That kind of place is for women," and he drove off.

The owner of the shop was a balding red-haired woman with a black and yellow smile. Her sunken black eyes, overly round head, and unaltered smile made her look like a jack-O-lantern. "Hi" she said in a

ghorly manner with her belly hanging over her
lt. "My name's Martha, and I sell bottles and raise
gs. If you want, you can look out the window and
e the little porkers sloshing around in the mud."

"No thank you," said Phillip.

"Well take a look at the bottles then. I got
enty of them. There's green ones and red ones and
e prettiest purples you ever did see. Sometimes
hen the sun is bright the whole room is just dancing
th color."

"Could I please have a glass of water?" asked
Phillip.

"Sure thing," said Martha, "It'll cost you two
nts."

"I don't have any money," said Phillip.

"I don't have any money either," Martha told
m. Do you really think that there's any kind of
ing to be made by selling bottles. Lord knows, I
ven't eaten anything but pig meat for the last fifty
ars."

"For the sake of just two cents you would deny
e a drink of water?" asked Phillip, but he knew that
ere was more to it than that. Poor Martha would
e any excuse to tell someone her problems. She was
sad lonely woman. Phillip didn't need water
yway, so he left her shop saying, "I could have a
t of fun in here with a sledge hammer. Good day,
d remember - you are what you eat, so you are a
t pig. Change your name to Piggy Porkonioni."

the third part

Phillip found himself back in the woods waiting
r another ride. Dark clouds covered the sun. Soon
e woods were wet with summer rain. The water
ent through Phillip like a shiver. The forest became
very dreary place. The squirrels didn't like the rain,
either did the raccoons. Phillip was miserable. Only
e flies were enjoying themselves. The ghost felt
solate and frustrated. He was cold, lonely, wet and
ad. What could be worse?

The morning came and the rain left. Phillip dried
mself in the warm sun and started down the road
nce more. As the day progressed, the heat became
bearable. The sun was hotter than a preacher's
nts. All the way through the forest he wore a halo
flies. Great drops of sweat poured from his chin.

"Can't you leave me alone?" he asked the flies.

"No," they buzzed.

"Isn't it enough that I feed your young with my
esh? Stop pestering me. Grown up Maggots! You
ke a little nibble and leave me with your tiny
oppings and spittle. I wish I had been cremated so
not to spawn any more of you."

The flies buzzed about in their circle like
-planes from World War I. They were dog-fighting

and arguing at the same time. "I want him," buzzed
one. "No, I want him," buzzed another. The flies
fought like that all afternoon while Phillip hurled
abuses at them.

the fourth part

The next person to pick Phillip up was a
counselor at a near-by summer camp. He had blonde
hair that was so wavy it made Phillip think of the
Bobsey Twins Visit the Sea Shore.

"What are you doing around here? Looking for a
job?" asked the counselor.

"No," replied Phillip, "Not really."

"I hate what I'm doing. I've got a job at a girls'
camp about a mile down the road in the opposite
direction."

"A girls' camp. I imagine that would be a lot of
fun," said Phillip. "You should be enjoying yourself."

"Not with these girls," said the counselor.
"They're all atheletes. Ever meet a lady jock before?
You wouldn't believe them. Close cropped hair cuts,
bulging biceps, ten extra pounds in each thigh. It's
absolutely disgusting. They're plenty stacked, stacked
as hell really, but it's nothing but pure sag. I thought
it would be great, working in a girls camp, until I saw
all those woman physical education majors. There
was one girl there I thought that I might go after. She
always wears those bell bottom type pants, and she
wears them really tight, see. Nice butt on that chick,
like hard rubber balls. But then I saw her in a bathing
suit, and it was really disgusting. Her legs were tre-
mendously swollen from the knees down, and it look-
ed like she was wearing flesh colored bell bottoms. I
nearly threw up, no kidding. And the little kids drive
me crazy. They're all a bunch of spoiled brats with no
discipline. The eight-year-olds are afraid that I'm
going to rape them, only they think that rape means
undress. That's what the head counselor told them. I
may get horny sometimes, but hell, I ain't no child
molester."

The counselor was quiet for awhile after that.
Then he grew bored with his driving and began to
sing:

M is for the many times he's kissed me.

O is for the other times he's tried.

T is for the tourist trap we stayed in.

H is for the hatred deep inside.

E is for the energy we wasted.

R is for regrets and so you see

Put them all together, and they spell mother,
because that is what that bastard made of me.

"Isn't that funny?" asked the counselor, and he
sang it again in case Phillip had missed something.
"The girls sing it all the time at camp," said the
counselor. "I'm so sick of all those camp songs. The

name of the camp is Camp Hiatruda, and the colors are green and blue."

"Hiatruda sounds like a cross between Hiawatha, a tuna, and a barracuda," said Phillip.

"This is what their fight song is like," said the counselor. He began to sing again, which did not please Phillip at all.

The green is for honor
and the blue is for glory
and they both unite Hiatruda
Hiatruda!
We'll put them together
in fair and stormy weather on the fields of far and
wide.
We'll fight for living and the joy of giving
with our hearts to
Hiatruda!

"That's a very nice fight song," said Phillip.

"I can't stand it," replied the counselor. "I've only heard it three million times.

the fifth part

While walking through the forest, Phillip met two other hitch-hikers, a young dark-haired boy, and a girl with blue eyes. Phillip introduced himself, but not as a ghost. The boy's name was Paul, and the girl's name was Louise.

"Where are you two heading?" asked Phillip.

"We're just going around in circles enjoying ourselves," said Louise with a big smile on her face, "Isn't the forest beautiful. It smells so fresh."

The forest smells like dirt and animal crap. There's so many flies here. I think I may scream," muttered Paul.

The three of them walked along the edge of the road. The woods were empty except for the animals and the glass bottles. Overhead, the sky was dark and threatened rain.

"This is very romantic," Louise said.

"It's romantic if you happen to be a squirrel or a beer bottle," mumbled Paul.

"You are always so very cynical, but I like you anyway," she said. "You're one of my favorite friends." Louise then walked ahead of Phillip and Paul, her zorries flopping and kicking up sand.

"Are you in love with her?" asked Phillip.

"Thank god I'm not," replied Paul.

"She's very much in love with you."

"I know that. I'm not blind. She was in love with another guy last year, and they grew to be very close friends. Finally the poor guy did fall in love with her, and he wrote her a letter telling how he felt. She suddenly lost interest in him. She only wants love until it becomes a reality. Deep down inside she really hates herself."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Phillip. "She hates herself?"

"Try to compliment her," Paul explained. "She'll reject it. She won't believe you. She hates herself so much that she can not accept any love. That's why the only love she cherishes is the unrequited kind. She pours out love like a celestial mother octopus, but she doesn't want it thrown back in her face. Affection turns sour if it's in her hands. I really hate having her put demands on me like this. I feel as though I'm obligated, but I'm not really. She thrives on my indifference. I have very little love to give her, and unlike Louise, I am very much in love with myself."

"You are very selfish," said Phillip.

Paul, Phillip, and Louise came to a lazy, small town. Bare-footed little boys with crew cuts were playing in the water from a fire hydrant. Rich old women with wire-rim bi-focals were sitting next to little girls in pig tails who looked uncomfortable in the skirts. Summer flowers were in bloom. A group of teenagers were talking about hitch-hiking to a nearby town, for the local movie theater was closed.

"Why don't we all get some ice cream?" asked Paul. "I'll pay, and I need a restroom anyway."

Phillip and Louise sat and had their ice cream while Paul relieved himself.

"What's between you and Paul?" asked Phillip.

"I dearly love him," she said sincerely. "I couldn't tell you why either. He's not very nice to me at all. He's not attracted to me. I know I'm not very pretty."

"You are very pretty," said Phillip.

"I don't think so," she said, "Neither does Paul. He thinks I'm dumb too, because I can't understand those silly books he keeps telling me to read. I read everything he tells me to, but I don't really enjoy the kind of stuff."

"Why don't you just forget about him?"

"I love him. Do you know how it's like when you fall in love? It's unexpected and unrehearsed. It happens for no reason at all. Even when it's with

erson who is everything you are not, there's nothing
ou can do about. Nothing."

Paul didn't come back. He paid for the ice cream
nd left a note for Louise. She sat down with Phillip
nd read the entire letter aloud. It had taken Paul a
ull hour to write it.

"Dear Louise," she read, her face whiter than
hillip's who was a ghost, "Today I came to the
ealization that I no longer wish to be your friend. I
hink that the antipathy towards you which I feel had
een with me a long time, it is just that I never saw it
ntil I verbalized my feelings with that stranger. We
ere never really friends, but we acted the part
xcellently. I lacked only the resolve to abandon the
orps of our relationship. As we both know, God
orsakes those who will not abandon corpses. I feel
ke a fly who has ungraciously crawled inside
omeone's nostril. Once my curiosity is satisfied, I
ish to leave for the nostril is too hot for me.
Unfortunately it is very sticky inside someone's nose.
We have been close for a long time, or at least we
ave pretended to be; We are so unlike and there are
o many things which we dislike about each other
hat I find it difficult to believe that we were ever
riends. How could we have stayed so mutually blind
o the wall which separates us for so long. I
arbourred the delusion that you were as close to me
s some of my real friends. I even thought that my
ondness came close to being love. What a strange
elusion.

I am waking from this afternoon's day dream. I
m shaking off abstraction after abstraction. I may
et drown in my confusion before I finish this letter.
My pencil is putting splinters in my hand. I think that
he birds outside this restroom window will be ro-
ots. When the rain comes, they will rust among the
lowers. I am not angry at you in the least. You have
een innocent in your actions. Yet I feel that I would
be justified in hating you. Your presence irritates me.
You accuse me of being a cynic, of being serious all
he time. I'm not like that when I'm around other
people. You bring out the worst in me. No matter
what you say, I want to contradict it. I'm going home
without you. You can continue your wandering with
that stranger. I want nothing more to do with you. I
am sawing the chain that holds the handcuffs togeth-
er. I want to wear my cuff like a silver bracelet, and I
don't want you dangling from it. The birds are rust-
ing, Louise, they are rusting among the flowers.

The natural human tendency is to gloss over all



Stuart Hoppen

experiences. If you think realistically of all the time we spent together, you'll see that we never really enjoyed ourselves. I constantly insulted, and I wasn't joking when I insulted you, even though I pretended I was. I got so little satisfaction from those cruel words. I really didn't care how they affected you, I simply disliked myself for acting in that manner. I really don't even care what your reaction to this letter will be. It doesn't matter whether it elates or depresses you. I simply wish to be rid of your presence.

Once a fly crawled into my nostril. I had a terrible nose bleed as a result of it, and the poor little fellow came out one leg at a time. I will clean my system of you if I have to begin by pulling out your toes, then your fingers, your arms and legs. You have ugly toes. They look like hump backed whales. All I can smell now is urine. I will think of you every time I go to the bathroom.

I have said all I wish to say. For god's sake don't cry, don't miss me, and leave me alone."

"Did he end there?" asked Phillip.

the sixth part

This is still the story of a ghost named Phillip who went hitch-hiking in the country to find himself. Paul went home and Louise went home. The wavy-haired counselor went back to the girls' camp with its lady athletes and spoiled children. The iron farmer went back to his farm and Martha went back to her pigs. Phillip had nowhere to go because he didn't want to return to his graveyard.

The next person to pick Phillip up was a quiet young man whose eyes were shadows. He drove a new car with comfortable seats and air conditioning. Phillip relaxed, listened to the radio, and watched the country side slither away like a snake in a hurry. The driver offered Phillip a beer. The ghost smiled, and peeled off the tab. They drove in silence for many miles.

The young man finally came to a clearing in the forest. He parked his car on a concrete driveway. He got out, unlocked an iron gate, and drove through. Beyond the gate lay the town dump.

He parked his car on a level plain beside the cliff where the garbage was dumped. The cliff sloped its way into a gully which was filled with refuse. The entire slope itself was a sea of trash.

The silent young man opened his beer. "This is the most beautiful spot on Earth," he said, "I can think of no greater escape. The rats and roaches have built up their civilization on the remains of ours."

Phillip surveyed the sea that rolled around him. Dust and glass, rust and tin. There were the corpses of used cars and tractors. Unwanted refrigerators lay scattered about with their doors torn off.

"I know what you are thinking," the young man told Phillip. "It is possible indeed to interpret the universe in terms of broken glass and worn out tires. Too often we think that life is too important. When I come here I can see that nothing is important. I can't take myself seriously when I'm surrounded by garbage, that's why I enjoy myself when I come here."

He then picked up an old movie projector and hurled it into the gully. It bounced and rattled on the way down. He turned his back on the gully and walked back to his car. He opened the trunk to get out his six-pack.

"Have you ever seen so much glorious junk in your life?" asked the young man. "I'm going to get drunk on my ass. You can join me if you wish."

The young man and the ghost started a small fire. Soon a portion of the cliff was ablaze. Old newspapers withered in the path of the flames. Aerosol cans exploded. They rolled ancient rubber tires down the slope into the gully. They laughed like twin hyenas.

With rocks from around the ledge they began to shatter bottles and put dents in rusty refrigerators. Phillip climbed atop a deserted tractor. He played with the stick shift while the young man sat down on the treads. "During my life," said Phillip, "I always made plans and tried to stick to them. I always felt obligated to things which really never mattered at all. I always felt that what I was doing was important, like I thought it was important that I find myself. All I was doing was looking for a cause, but no cause is really that important."

The young man assumed the pose of Rhodin's thinker. "Did you ever find a cause?" he asked. "Isn't that what finding yourself is all about, finding something you believe to be greater than you are and sublimating yourself in it. Saying that I'm going out to find an ocean ambiguous enough to drown my identity."

"I never found a cause," said Phillip.

The two men played in the garbage until nightfall. Phillip sat and stared at the fire.

"I'm leaving now," said the young man.

"I'm very pleased that I met you," said Phillip.

"Aren't you coming?"

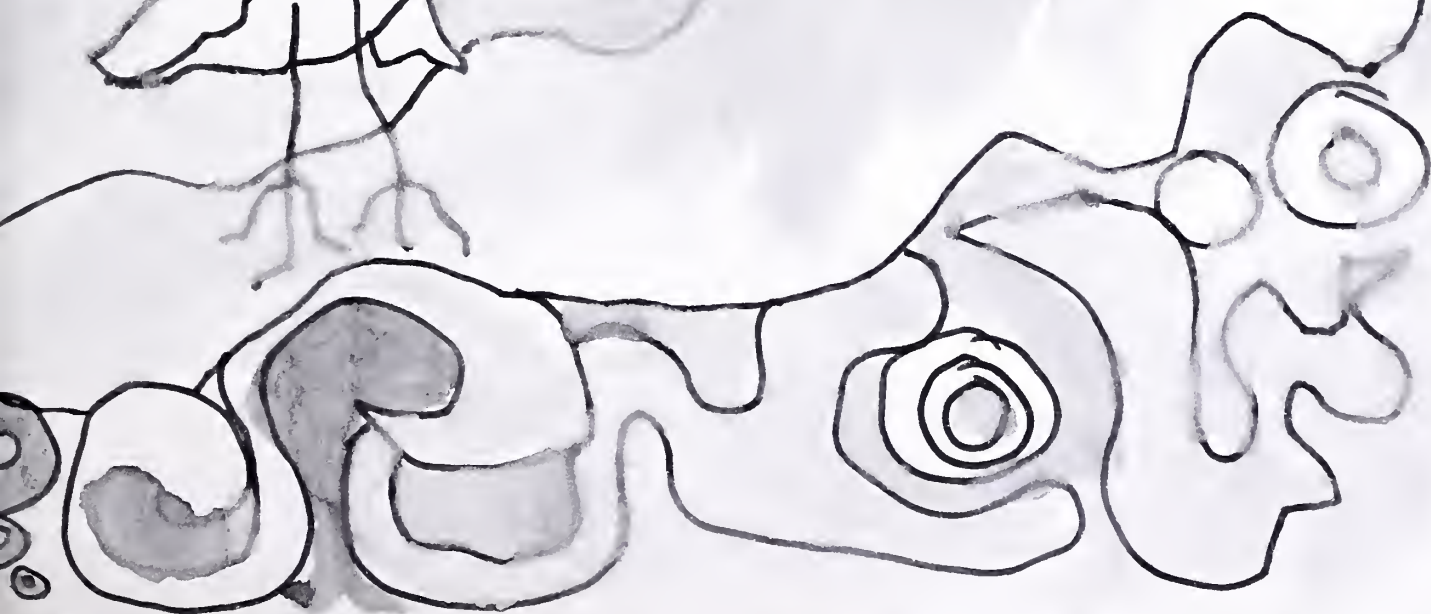
"No," replied Phillip.

"Well, good luck to you then."

This is the end of this ghost story. Phillip was a ghost who went hitch-hiking to find an ocean to drown his identity in. He met an iron farmer, a pig woman, a counselor from a summer camp, and two young people who took themselves too seriously. Finally, he decided to haunt a junk yard, and there he reigns, a monarch among the rust.

the boy said
he threw
bread

(not a stone)
at the gull
so i made him
eat it



The Flower Gods are angry
and the ants are afraid,
waiting for a soft and soothing
rain that will never come
because nothing human can ever
deliver it.
Chrysanthemum goddesses
have gone,
Flying high on their
Crystal butterflies
with dewdrop wings
and pollen feelers.
The Flower Gods
The Pedestal People
They're dying
and the ants are angry.

TERRY TAFOYA

Men may turn into Wolves
By the light of an opaque moon,
But if a May-fly happens along
At just the proper moment,
 Eastern Standard time,
 When the lunar light is white-washing
 The spring, and Holly-hocks are
 Half-open,

It
Turns into
May.

And this is the dream of every true May-fly
For only one fly can make it a year,
After all, who ever heard of a month with two Mays,
So the next time you think of it,
Take a peek at the somethings that
Curl about your lights, as they bide their time,
 Waiting for their moment,
 Of thirty days of Joy
 In early Spring.

What
If they
Forgot?

ELIZABETH

"Come along, Elizabeth," said Mrs. Vincent, "don't stare at her." She jerked her daughter's arm, pulling her out of the path of an old woman. The woman leaned with her full weight on a knobby heavy cane, and looked at the two, with pale watery eyes. Her hair that should have been white was yellowed and streaked with dirty, darkest brown, and her face was dusty and so full of wrinkles it was almost smooth.

"I pity you," she whispered, her voice rough, and a visible effort to project.

"How dare you pity my child, you filthy old woman!" Mrs. Vincent pushed her daughter behind her skirt, and glared back with cold, cold eyes.

"I do not feel sorry for your child," she hissed, "I pity you." She turned her head, and leaned once more on the heavy cane, shuffling her lifeless feet ahead.

"Filthy old woman," spat Mrs. Vincent, dragging Elizabeth after her.

"I hate old women," said Elizabeth.

"Filthy old woman," repeated her mother, ignoring Elizabeth.

Elizabeth combed her hair, gazing deeply into the mirror. She smiled. "I'm beautiful," she said, and smiled again. She lit a cigarette, and blew a puff of smoke into her reflection.

"Help me, dear," called her mother, from the bedroom. "Carry me to my chair."

Elizabeth stamped her cigarette in the ashtray. "Filthy old woman," she thought.

She leaned on the doorway, and watched her mother trying to sit up on the bed. "You ungrateful creature," said her mother. "I did everything for you. I've sacrificed for you, you wretched girl."

"You never did anything for me," said Elizabeth. "Die for me, now."

"I hate you, I've been such a good mother, but you always were such a selfish, evil child!"

"Filthy old woman," she said, returning to the other room.

Elizabeth sat crying on the hard, peeling bench. Her shaking hand brought a handkerchief to her eyes. She picked up her cane, and tapped it gently on the cement.

"Come, child, don't stare," said the young mother, holding her little girl's hand.

"I pity you," said Elizabeth.

"You have a lot of nerve, feeling sorry for me, I'm young and beautiful, and look at you," she said, pulling her child next to her.

"I don't pity you," Elizabeth whispered, "I pity your daughter."

I watch every day
as you spin glass balls
with your silver fingers.
I watch every day
and I wait,
dreaming of the time they'll fall,
and break.
I'm waiting,
Are they slipping?
Did your thumb quiver?
I'm watching.
They shall burst in a splendid shower
of sharpness and hints of stars,
and your fingers will bleed,
of sharpness and hints of stars,
and your fingers will bleed,
and I'll be watching.
I'm waiting.



Stuart Hopon

THE FORGOTTEN

by CHYLENE CORBETT

There had never been any doubt in her mind that someday, she, Laura would be famous. She didn't know when she first knew that she was to be famous; it had always been something she took for granted, as she did breathing and the color of her eyes. The how and why of her fame had never seriously concerned her. Perhaps it would fall from the sky one day in a gentle shower like spring rain, and envelop her in its shining glory, or arrive on her doorstep in a neat little package; it didn't matter. Fame would come, someday, and that was all that mattered.

This certain knowledge sustained her throughout a lonely childhood while other little girls ignored her, and little boys had chased her and called her nasty names. And during her anonymous adolescence, and subsequent youth, while other girls had dated and had beaux and corsages and gone to Proms and parties, she had sat in her lonely room, and thought of the Fame coming to her, and the millions and millions of handsome, rich beaux she would have then! Her dreams had been warm and comforting when Papa had died, and college had to be forgotten when

Mama became sick.

"... But I'm thirty-four ... " she whispered to her reflection that morning. "I am thirty-four years old "

She twisted her mouse-colored hair into a tight chignon. It suddenly occurred to her that she had never been beautiful, no, not even slightly pretty. She studied her narrow face, the washed-out grey of her eyes, fading into her shallow skin. Beauty had somehow escaped her ... was fame to escape her too? The thought sent a fearful grip to her stomach, and made her mouth go dry; to be anonymous - - unseen and unwanted for the rest of her life - - ! Panic began to grow upon her, seizing at her ...

"When?" she asked the mirror through clenched teeth. "WHEN!" But the mirror told her nothing.

"LAURAAAA!!!!" Mama's voice quavered through the house, hitting against the ceiling, battering the windows. "LAURA! I WANT MY MEDICINE!! I WANT MY MEDICINE NOW!!!!"

Laura sighed, and turned away from the mirror, the panic easing into a flutter, a bit like stage fright must be, for Laura

had never been on a stage.

"Yes, Mama ... " She called tiredly. "I'm coming ... "

Mrs. Bowers, Laura's mother, was eighty-four. She was confined to her sickbed by old age, grief at the death of her husband (although Mr. Bowers had died twenty-some-odd years ago, and she had gotten on quite well for ten years there after) rheumatism, and pure malice, or so Laura thought on particularly bad days.

"Laura!! My back hurts!! Rub my back Laura!!" Her mother commanded as she entered the room.

"Yes, Mama ... "

"And be careful - - you know 'bout my lumbago!"

"Yes, Mama ... "

"I want some tea!! Fix me some tea!!"

"Yes, Mama ... "

Laura eventually got to the tea, after she had opened the windows in her mother's room, straightened the rugs, moved each little object on the night tables just so, changed the flowers in the huge ironware vase that stood on the top of the bureau, and dusted off the sills and furniture.

Mama was to be picky today,

she decided, as she set the kettle on the stove. While she waited for it to boil, she gazed out the kitchen window into the sunlit backyard.

It was one of those rare, pricelessly beautiful days, just before spring turns into summer or fall into winter. It was a shining, brilliant, cotton-cloud shaded day, with the breeze just tossing the tree tops. She knew the air outside would be fresh and cool with a hint of winter in it, enough to sweeten it without chilling . . . such a lovely, lovely day.

Odors that she had not noticed in years suddenly assailed her nostrils. The dank, heavy sour odors of age and sickness, linens and disinfectant, old clothes and furniture wax settled on her skin and soaked into her clothes, seeping into her very soul, making her feel spoiled and dirty. Laura suddenly had the most urgent need to fling open the door and run out into that fresh sweet air, to dance and sing and laugh at the sky in the sunlight. She felt ugly and rank and stale as the air she breathed - - - she moved towards the door, bracing herself for the first fresh, sweet lungful of the spring air. Her scalp tingled for the first heat of the golden sun. Her hand closed upon the knob, trembling in expectation the teakettle began shrieking.

"LAURA!! LAURA!! I heard the kettle!! I heard it!! I want my tea!! I want my tea!!" Her mother clamored shrilly.

Laura drew a deep shuddering breath, and then turned away from the door. She made the tea, and some crackers, and took them to her mother. Then, she washed her, changed her bedding, gave her some medicine, fluffed up her pillows, fixed the curtains, combed her straggly gray hair, and put up with the string of abuse her mother saw fit to needle her with.

"You nasty, ungrateful, lout of a girl! It's about time you learned true gratitude! Why, your father and I sacrificed and saved to bring you up right! It's about time you repaid us!!" And when Laura started to move one of the chipped knick-knacks that her mother cluttered her table with . . . 'You great ugly thing! Put that down!! I won't allow you to touch Grandmama's things! You're sure to break it!!"

"Grandmother didn't give you this - - " Laura began tiredly. "DON'T YOU DARE CONTRADICT YOUR MOTHER!!" Mrs. Bowers shrieked.

But at last the old woman was asleep, snoring noisily, and Laura was free to sit in the living room to rest, to light a forbidden cigarette, and prop her feet on the faded hassock. She sighed in relief, and picked up the newspaper idly.

"SIX MURDERED!!!!!!" The headlines screamed, "BLOODIEST MURDER IN HISTORY OF STATE!!!" She absently studied the pictures sprawled across the front page, of a rather desperate-looking

man, and smiling, idle poses of his six victims, taken, no doubt, from old graduation pictures and the like.

She read the article, although she didn't want to. It was full of gory details and peculiarities of the murderer's life history. She recognized the phrases . . . "broken home . . . drunken father . . . violent life . . ." She laid the paper aside after she had finished, and her mind turned to other things. She didn't want to keep living off her mother's charity, from the insurance money, but when she mentioned jobs or leaving, her mother threw terrible scenes . . but if she was ever to find fame, she would have to leave, someday. It couldn't escape her, not like everything else had. She stared dully out the window, at the cotton clouds, and the trees tossed by the light, fresh breezes.



Evening came, as draggingly and dull as every other day's end, and she walked to the town for her evening meal. The night had turned heavy and sullen, humidity thickening the atmosphere till she felt the air, rather than breathed it. The night seemed to

close in on her, enveloping her in its clammy folds . . . she found herself hurrying from street light to street light, as if their pools of light were islands of salvation in the center of a vast, black ocean. "Don't be foolish!!": She told herself sternly. "You're a fully grown woman, not a child!"

Her destination was reached, one of the few good, inexpensive restaurants in town. She went there often, for her mother didn't like the smell of cooking.

She sat at a small table, far in the corner of the room, where it was dark and ill-lighted. She did this automatically, not even thinking why she did so. She sat alone, and sipped her soup, her eyes fastened firmly to the plate; she was so lonely, and so proud . . . too proud to look up, and perhaps meet the eye of a neighbor, or stranger. She knew that they would not see or look at her; she spared herself this pain by staring resolutely at nothing.

After her silent meal, she paid her tab, and was given her change by a bored, bleary-eyed waitress who stared through her. She walked home, window-shopping by street lamps, the dull light casting rich, mellow shadows over the shoddiest merchandise.

She had always loved beautiful, rich things, clothes and furniture of rich, expensive fabrics, and leather shoes that shone of saddle soap and expensive waxes. She had always longed for something beautifully expensive, but of course, there was always Ma-

ma's doctor bills, and bills for water, and electricity, bills for Mama's cloths, and for food . . . and there never was enough left for frills for Laura.



Bile suddenly rose in her throat, and anger welled inside her, churning and swirling. Great red currents swam before her eyes, and beat her heart into a frenzy . . . oh, Laura got frills now and then . . . perhaps good stout, sensible shoes, or dark heavy suits for Laura, maybe from the bargain basement at Kingleys . . . while Mama - - oh, Mama always had the best!!

Always the best!! Laura could name every single lacy frill on her mother's hand-crocheted silk-beribboned bed jackets, because she herself ironed them at least once a week. And she knew the color of every single one of her mother's fluffy, voluminous silk nightgowns - she washed them herself and dried them carefully between two turkish towels so they wouldn't wrinkle e . . . for Mama so hated wrinkles . . . the ugly, stinking, mean, nasty, decrepit, selfish . . .

'She's my mother,' Laura thought ashamed. 'She's my

mother; she cared for me, brought me up . . . I can't feel this way. She cared for me when I was sick, and bought me clothes and gave me an allowance, even when times were hard . . . ' But her hands still clenched her pocketbook till the knuckles turned white and the fingers rigid.

She walked with stiff, puppet-like steps down the dark, empty street, to her house and up into her room. Listlessly, she prepared for bed, and loosened her hair. She brushed it slowly, for she always hoped that this nightly ritual would coax a faint shine from her listless tresses.

"What if - - what if I don't become famous? She whispered to her reflection. The brush hovered in mid air, and a ghostly Laura stared back at her from the mirror with frightened eyes. "Perhaps - - perhaps I will live out my entire span of existence in this dank, stuffy house, caring for this decrepit old woman, listening to her abuse, catering to her every need, and no one will ever know I existed . . . my tombstone will say, 'Laura Bowers Died,' and no one will ever stop to wonder who 'Laura Bowers Died' was, or how she spoke or thought or breathed. No one will ever know how she longed for fame and loved the fresh air and the cotton clouds - - " Sadness enveloped her, and then panic. The reflection-Laura stared back at her through stark, staring eyes as her dreams fled her one by one, churned around

her head and spun away. The lovely rich house with all the lovely, expensive things inside, the loving, passionate, loyal, movie-star husband, warm and tender. The children, their blank, featureless faces, sweet and obedient, patted her face with their soft sweet hands and fled. The crowds of anxious, following, adoring people all staring and craning their necks for glimpses of her fled - - - and she saw herself as she would be for the rest of her life; a mousy, meek creature with faded hair and faded clothes and faded skin and faded eyes, living in a faded room with a faded high school yearbook, the pages virgin of signatures, for her youth; walking through dark, lonely street or in empty lonely crowds where no one ever glanced at her, no one ever looked at her, no one ever saw her. Their eyes, blank and uncaring moving through her; a lonely old maid with a cup of tea for breakfast, and a piece of toast for lunch, living among the pale, faded, stale remnants of another woman's life - - - a horrible cry wrung from her, of fear, despair, pain... she wondered at the sound of it as it flew from her throat and battered at the windows. She spun away from the dressing table, and covered her face... her shoulders shook and her chest convulsed, but no sobs came. 'I've got to be famous... I've got to be famous... I've got to be famous... I've got to be...' she threw her house coat

on and wandered restlessly through the dark house. She didn't need a light; she had spent every day of her life in this house. She sat in the living room and stuck a cigarette in her mouth with trembling hands. She struck a match and the burst of sulphurous light, picked out the headlines on that days paper. "SIX MURDERED!!" The flame died, but her eyes remained riveted on that one word - - - MURDERED' It seemed to leap from the table at her, to shriek at her... she tasted the word, found it heavy and cloying, but palatable....



Who had Lucrezia murdered? And how many knew Lady Macbeth's victims? The Boston Strangler had many victims, and so did Jack the Ripper, but who remembered their names - - who cared of their deaths? It was the murderer... the one who struck down and killed... the one who tore and shredded... he was the one who got the acclaim and the fanfare, the one who's name shrieked in the headlines... he was the one who became...

who became....

"MURDERED!! MURDERED!! MURDERED!! MURDERED!! MURDERED!!"

When they led Laura away from the house the next morning, she was childishly pleased with the huge gaping crowd that had gathered, and the bright flashes of the photographer's cameras. She was glad she had done her hair carefully, and changed into her mother's nightgown... it was the little details that mattered... and these people who were craning their necks at her would want to tell their children and grandchildren about it someday... she nodded to her neighbors, and smiled benevolently at them... no use having hard feelings; let them share her glory too. Inexplicably, they turned away... very puzzling. She politely turned her attention to the reporters clustering about...

"Why'd you do it? Why'd you kill her?"

Laura smiled at them, soaking in their eager, glazed stares as a withered flower soaks in water, and tried to tell them about the cotton clouds and the golden sun, but they didn't seem to be very interested... 'ah well'. She told herself confidently, 'everyone will know someday'. She smiled, basking in the stares as she watched the white-coated attendants load what was left of her mother into an ambulance and cart her away...



Walking Streets

6:30 am

is

looking
at
a
world's
suicide
before
it
begins
...

star

We are the time beings
you and I
temporarily caught
in clock judgement

I am more curious every day
to find out whether I'll make it
out
tomorrow

And curiouser still
about the train time table
since I wonder if you'll loose the bonds
that tie me to these tracks
in time.

another day ended and
we
won
the
battle
it sure feels good to be a winner

- Laurie Luongo

K. D. GIBSON

The clock on the wall
Mirror of my soul
It has no voice
And yet it speaks.
Time is a child
In mischevious play.

- R. B. F.

I've long been tired of hoping
for someone to write a screenplay
I couldn't identify
with
all the Thanksgiving Day trimmings
and I just found out yesterday
that my secret island
has 488 permanent residents
a tourist season
and one bitch
I have finally realized that Catch-22
exists
and that communists are trying to save the world
from democracy
from the place I stand
I can see the end.

SAD

Sad is not enough.
It does not express a torn man
or give emptiness to an old woman.
Sad is less than half-
it only categorizes.

KIMBERLY HAGERTY

Suspicion

A clearing breaks somewhere
Nearby-just beyond the way
The waving of a mighty tree
Graces misty lakes with
Mirthful leaves
That follow the winds
Into languid muddy waters
For promises of freedom
Are often more deceptive than
A thousand mirror-like mirages.

We Had The Chance

I knew the time golden would shine
in all the while
Soon will come synthetic sun.
Yesterday we had a plan
to save our land.

Yesterday - a time of chance
time elapsed.
Mankind knew, he too,
soon was through
But stood his ground.

Legislatures knew
had more important things to do.
But time elapsed
they had the chance
With each day.

Now yesterday, birds would sing
and we would play.
With each day, brought yesterday
and time elapsed.

Our last frontier soon was near.
I knew the time
sea was mine
Brothers knowing well
enjoyed each swell
Still time elapsed.

Today, tomorrow was yesterday
and with each day
We had the way
But alas, you had the chance

- Sheffield Kenyon

Ivan Palacěk glanced at his watch and decided it would be best to hurry up; it was 7:15 already. He noted that even with his heavy leather boots on, the cobblestones still bothered his feet. Already Na Příkopě had many people walking about. Most were on their way to work, some to school, others were tourists.

He paused briefly in front of the Detský Dům, admiring a soccer ball. Petr, his son, would like that one. They could bring it to the cabin at Brno that weekend. He and his son could play soccer together. Yes, he'd have to buy that ball after work.

Work! He remembered the time and began running. He reached Čedok, the Socialist-modern building he came to five days a week.

"Dobrý den!" he called to Dagmara, the clerk, "What do we have today?"

"Dobrý den, Ivan, an American tour at eight."

"How many people?" he asked.

"Thirty or so," she replied.

"Děkuji," he smiled.

At 7:55 the bus arrived. Ivan greeted the tourists. They were a painfully typical-looking bunch, most were middle aged, some were younger. Most of them carried cameras. As soon as they had all settled, Ivan told the driver to start and picked up the micro-

phone.

"Good day to all of you" he said. "My name is Ivan Palacěk, I am your guide. On my behalf, and for Čedok, the national tourist bureau, let me welcome you to Prague."

They were a lively group and asked many questions, mostly historical, for which Ivan was thankful. One woman asked him where he was from. "I was born in Bratislava," he told her. "It's to the South-east of here. Very beautiful country." He smiled at the woman. "Where are you from?"

"Wapakoneta," she smiled.

"Oh, Yes. In Ohio. Where Armstrong your moonman is from, I believe.

She seemed shaken. "Yes, that's right" she said and walked away.

As they were passing Wenceslas Square, several women in coveralls were patching a hole in the sidewalk. A teenager asked him why the women did men's work. "The Czech people are proud. We're working together to make our country even greater." His story was lame; he knew the boy didn't believe him.

They saw the Hradčany Castle, St. Vitus' Cathedral, and the Vltava River. It was strange, Ivan noticed, that these people wouldn't know what they

IVAN

by CINDY THUMA

aw on their tour until they got their photographs back from the developers.

At 11:15 there was only one last stop, the Old Town Hall in the Staré Město. As they walked about the square, the teenager noticed tank tracks in the cobblestones. Ivan hoped the boy wouldn't comment, but he said, "Hey, what's this here?"

"Crane tracks," he lied, "there were cranes in here to renovate that building over there." The boy glared at him, Ivan turned away.

The tour was over. Ivan relaxed in the staff-room. Dagmara stuck her head in the door. "Anton Dubroviak wants to see you." She smiled. "It's good, Ivan, be happy." Ivan pulled on his tattered grey sweater and walked to the office marked "Director."

"Aah, Ivan, do come in." The portly director motioned toward a worn armchair. "Sit down, please."

The director pushed aside a small stack of papers. A portrait of Marx stared over the desk at Ivan.

"You have been a party member for 7 years, yes?"

"Yes," said Ivan.

"And a good member, I am told."

"Thank you, sir," Ivan said.

"Ivan, one of our employees in New York died suddenly from a heart attack. I feel you would be the best one to replace him."

His palms were feeling damp. "I'm most honored, sir," he replied.

"Naturally, this means you and your family will have to move to the United States. This means many changes in one's life."

"Yes, I realize this, sir." Ivan tried to appear calm.

„ . . . so" the director continued, "We will begin your training tomorrow. Why not go home now and tell your wife? Congratulations, Ivan."

A broad smile spread over his face. He grasped the man's outstretched hand and squeezed it. "Thank you, thank you, sir," he babbled and left the office.

He didn't notice the cobblestones as he ran up the Na Příkopě, he didn't see the dingy Slavic women sweeping the streets, or the toothless old men on the street benches. He felt only the dampness in his hands and a vaguely electric sensation along the back of his neck. As he ran, he passed a statue of Marx. He stopped and looked at the austere, deified image, smiled, and said almost inaudibly, "Goodbye, Karl. I don't have to be your friend anymore."

"SHE"

She knows she's been a lover
only she could be so sure
For it's love that is above her
Without it she'll endure

Love she may desire
the love she can't express
The more she will acquire
the more she'll want it less

Though she's got the feeling
she doesn't know it's all in vain
Will she still be healing
after feeling all the pain

Waiting for a new tomorrow
waiting for the rising sun
waiting for a love so far
waiting for it all to come

Bruce Cavoti

The Faded brown teddy bear,
lies discarded, with
One eye gone and a hole
in one ear;
A remnant of past love.

Joan Keever

Come Again, Come Again

The spring was warm and the flowers awoke and grew
But it was in the heat of the summer that they bloomed
Then came the fall and the petals softly drifted away
Now it is the winter and the beauty of flowers lie in decay
Down within do the seeds remain awaiting spring to beg
Or are flowers only meant for once, never to come again

A Flower of the Field

A flower conceived in purity to bloom
As fresh and clean as the morning dew
Nobody questioning its beautiful innocence
For they judge by the surface, not what's in it

Its stem slim and graceful, in perfection made
Leaves pointed upward, for life they beg
The soft, smooth petals upon the stem mount
But think of the roots, that's where it counts

What have the roots allowed to pass through
The filth infesting the dirt around it
Or just the pure dew, if the answer should be the first
Then God please have mercy upon my flower of the field.

Joyce Allen

A small splash
in the still water
and a ripple
p - u - s - h - e - s o - u - t - w - a - r - d ,
encountering other ripples,
ever groping,
until it is absorbed
by the distant shore.

Julie Calsi

There's a Lot to be Said for Salami

I like sauerkraut baked in tomato juice;
Prunes and peanut butter turn me on.
I like corn that's boiled in vinegar;
Grapefruit's groovie when

The beets go on,
When the beets go on.

But there's a lot to be said for salami;
You really could do much worse.
There's a lot to be said for salami:
Salami's got character. . .
Not like liverwurst!

Cream cheese and butterscotch,
Add some clove,
Now stir until the mixture's thin.
Open this end;
(Now don't break a fingernail!)

All's well that end's well

when the steaks come
marchin'in!

knowledge
 alone
 is worth nothing
 if it does not lead to understanding.

understanding
 by itself
 is worth naught
 until it brings about action.

action
 of itself
 is wasted
 unless it benefits the greatest number of people

and the ability to discern
the actions that will accomplish this end
 is Wisdom.

But there's a lot to be said for salami;
You really could do much worse.
There's a lot to be said for salami;
Salami's got character. . .
Not like liverwurst!

i love to hear about
your pains
they make
you
seem more
real

For Barbara

Saturday, after
(or during)
my bath
I remembered
(or, thought I remembered)
the first time I saw you
your face in the frame
of Africa's daughters and sons
was a sight to behold
(i beheld)

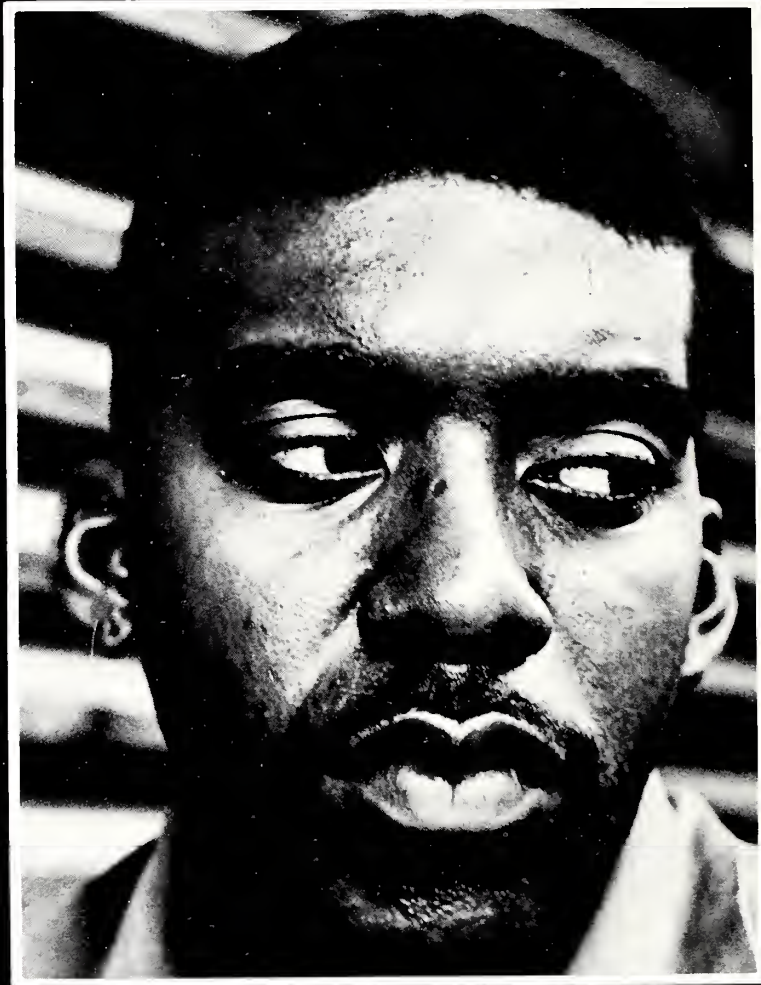
RUBEN BETANCOURT

(your memory)
'till I saw you again
framed this time by the sun
in the enormous yard
of my dreams

(now; what was it you were saying
about dreams?)

The breeze inside the bark of trees
a metaphor of spring
Tchaikovsky does his thing
while curtains in the chambers blow
their magic colors as proud flags of some unknown
city risen from the sea

without you





I'd rather be mad and be able to write
Than be sane and have nothing to say.

If I reached out
with clenched fist
would you have the strength
to pry apart
my fingers?

I know the maddening pastels
of an unshared sunset
that burns itself
into my loneliness.

G. MEREDITH KNOWLAND

I remember the fading hues
of a gone-forever rainbow
that arched its stale promise
over a damp landscape.

I hear the crushing chords
of a mute symphony
to whose noteless melody
my bitter disappointment sings.

I feel that distracting weight
of that divisible, unshared
part of myself.

Every day
I send myself out
and every day
I come back
empty handed.
Even Noah got
an olive branch.

a butterfly aiming haphazardly
for a nearby dewdripped branch
settles on a single drop
without shattering it.

Statues stare back in soundless panic,
sightless eyes straining
to close their marble lids.

Their nobly hewn chests captured,
a last frenzied gasp trapped,
one stagnating breath in stone chests.

Punished by their past prominence,
unwilling monuments, doomed by their deeds,
to stand in right valor till time and climate release them.

In the corner of a small
antique shop, effectively
hidden from the casual
browsing glances of what
few customers entered the
show,

leaned

a

rather

small

picture,

the

dust

of motionless years

resting

in
minutely
multiplying
layers

on its canvas

and collecting

We have gained wealth and acclaim,
since we first met several years ago.
Atrophy has taken its share now,
as age-filled wrinkles have covered the earth.
They have made a playground for our children,
with the bitter dust of enmity,
just as they have scorned our very existence.

We were comfortable and secure in a warm feeling,
held up close and sheltered from everything.
Our lives had been encompassed,
by the ideals instilled upon us,
and my thoughts kept pacing the floors.
A hand touched my shoulder,
while begging me for consultation;
we agreed to follow its natural course.
Then, in a whisper,
seemingly to color my arms and hers,
our desires were tinted with purple.
There was a mirror reflecting from behind,
that displayed our pale flesh upon the wall,
forming a cloud of euphoria.
It then appeared to - - - burst apart,
forcing its contents to gather upon us,
clinging to the sides for guidance.
Together for three years,
we have dissolved our friendship,
and resolved to make one from two.

A day or so shall be received with open hands,
waiting patiently to see if the next one will come.
Sitting on the floor eating crackers and cheese,
I poked at the holes in my shoes,
with a broken pencil I had found that afternoon.
"There is a generation that surpasses ours,
somewhere." I said to myself.
But for the time being, I shall be concerned with tomorrow,
because the bomb may come next week.
Then, who will laugh at Red Skelton,
or criticize Nixon for the war over there.
I have absorbed through my ears,
all that has been said about the great plane strike.
Sifting like flour, strong steel particles,
that have remained to stain our heritage;
I cannot tell myself or others what the outcome will be,
because if I do - - - there will be no answer.

J. S. MIRANTI

time wrote its song -- all over my face
and try though I might, it can't be erased

John talked about man -- how man could be free;
just spit on the rules, and live like a tree

behind bars of rules is how man lives -- he said
and for those who don't like it, it's bars of iron instead

John, I can't help it, it's time that's to blame
be humble or be famous, death is the same

so John stop pretending -- there's no ladder to climb
we're the children and prisoners of nature and time

the living have rules, both you and the tree
spit on the rules, but don't claim you're free

time wrote its song -- on the earth -- on its face
and try though we might, it can't be erased.

- Bruce Gregg



...And yes, son,
when you come home late at night
with tears still fresh in your eyes,
and have no explanation for them,
yourself,
I will understand.
Because I have been in your place before.

- Mik Borowski



By MICHAEL BURNEY

I am near the end of my journey. Nothing do I have to look forward to, but . . . well what could it be? Darkness? Gloom? Hell? Can you blame me for worrying? I have never experienced death. I am unfamiliar with the fellow. But soon I shall encounter him and be embraced by his chilling arms.

However, since my time is short, I will not bore you with my misery, but rather enlighten you on how not to make the same mistake that I did. Pay close attention to me, my friend, and heed my warning.

I once was a peaceful, God-loving man, who

lived in a small village. It was a peaceful village with a school, a store, a blacksmith, and a church. The first three are of no importance in regard to what I have to say, so I shall dwell on the church.

I was a regular church attendant and had just as much knowledge of the Bible as the minister. I had been brought up to believe that the only way to life eternal is to obey the laws of God and the laws of man as long as they are not contrary to God's. Please do not get the impression that I am being boastful, but I must say that I was a truly devoted Christian.

Beth, my wife, was also loyal to the Christian faith, and we were bringing our two children up with the same beliefs.

As I said before, this was a peaceful village with the absence of malice,. What am I saying? Pardon me, my friend, but I have just lied to you. The village did not have the absence of malice, for there was one as sinful as Satan himself. Voltar was his name, and to this very day I still have doubts about his name, for it seems to me that only the most evil of demons could possess such a name. What am I saying? This man was evil . . . the dog, I'd spit on his mother's grave and curse her for ever giving birth to such a sinister being. But let me hurry and finish, for my time is getting short.

Everyone in the village avoided Voltar, for they feared and dreaded him; and likewise, Voltar would have nothing to do with the people. He would sometimes stay isolated in that dreary house of his for weeks before ever showing his ugly face; and believe me, my friend, it was a hideous face.

It was pale and covered with wrinkles. His white hair was always disheveled, and his grey lifeless eyes gave the long face a look of fierceness and damnation itself.

Whenever he walked the streets, one had better stay clear of him, for one would never know when he might get the urge to rap someone with his cane. He once whipped a small girl with his cane, because the child accidentally ran into him while chasing her puppy. Not only did he beat the child, but he also killed the pup by snatching it from the hands of a young man who had retrieved it, and choked it to death. Angered by the old man's actions, the young man advanced on Voltar, who was now swearing outrageously and wildly swinging that damn cane. The young man, who, by the way, was the minister's son, was struck in the eye, and many times over the head. He was as helpless as the child. The old bastard then went on about his business.

The very next day the village constable went to find him for such vile actions, but was chased away by gunfire.

The minister was naturally upset, because of his son's injury, but showed no anger, for he was a Christian. Feeling that I should do something as a follower of God, I invited the minister to dinner. During the course of his visit we came to a decision that we would both pay Voltar a visit and attempt to persuade him to refrain from his evil ways and accept the Christian doctrine, which he outwardly despised. My wife firmly objected to this, saying that it would be a useless task. However, the minister and I had agreed, and we would not change our minds, for we felt that it was our Christian duty to take such a course of

action.

Despite the old man's warning after he spotted us through his window, the minister and I proceeded to the door. The minister knocked twice. "Go away, Christian dogs," Voltar shouted.

"Let us in," the minister replied. "You won't regret it in the end." There was no reply. Suddenly rain drops began to fall. The minister slowly opened the door, and entered the house; I followed closely behind. The house had a gloomy appearance, and a musky odor. There were two candles burning, one on each side of a rather large portrait of a woman that was on the wall. I figured that it must have been his mother. I just could not bring myself to believe that it was his wife, for what woman in her right mind would have wanted to marry a man with such a callous disposition.

Then he appeared. His slender, sinister appearance caused me to tremble, however the minister seemed quite calm.

"Get out of my house," Voltar ordered.

"We want to help you," the minister replied.

"No one wants to help me," the old man said. "And I want help from no one, so leave me be."

"You must not continue to act like this," said the minister. "You must repent and have faith in God. You must read the Bible and find out about God, and just what is right and what is wrong in His eyes. If you think about the universe, you almost have to conclude that some supreme being had something to do with the creation. You have to agree, Mr. Voltar, that everything in the universe had to be formed from something else, well . . . where did that something else come from? In other words, Mr. Voltar, the first bit of matter in the universe . . . Where did it come from? Did it create itself spontaneously, or was there some spiritual power behind it?"

"God did all of this creating, you say," Voltar said in a rather harsh tone. "Well, answer me this, who created God?"

"No one," the minister replied, still calm. "God is immortal, and anyone who is immortal cannot be born into immortality unless he was given birth by another who is greater than God, which I seriously doubt."

"Interesting," the old man replied, but not as harshly as before. "Come with me, I wish to talk with you further." I started to follow, but the old rascal stopped me. "You remain here," he ordered. "I wish to speak with him privately."

I waited seemingly forever. Finally Voltar emerged from the other room, but the minister was not with him. He sat down, completely ignoring my presence, and began smoking a pipe. "Where is the

minister?" I asked. Voltar said nothing. I asked again, and still there was no reply from him. The third time I screamed the question at him, but he still refused to answer me. I quickly ran into the room from which he had just emerged. The minister was not there. I began to call him, but received no answer. By now, fear was beginning to creep upon me like a stalking beast. I spotted a closed door at the far end of the room. I quickly made my way to it, opened it and saw something lying at the bottom of the long stairway which led from the door. I ran swiftly down the stairs. When I reached the bottom there was a large trunk. Curious of what might have been inside, I opened it and was shocked out of my head when I found the body of the minister with a knife in his throat. In all my life I had never been so frightened. I began to tremble uncontrollably, perspiration was emerging from my pores. I knew not what to do. Surely if this wicked man had killed the minister, he had plans to kill me also. I began to feel faint, things around me began to look hazy, and it seemed as though all of reality was slowly drifting away.

Then it happened. I cannot explain how, but it happened, and I found myself to be no longer afraid, but totally outraged. No longer was I the kind-hearted timid Christian, but rather like a madman who was angry at the world. I began to think of that old bastard. "He must die," I thought. I pulled the knife from the minister's throat and ran up the stairs and back into the room where that damned old warlock was still sitting smoking that pipe. He began to stare at me with those eyes which looked like death itself. I quickly ran to him and savagely thrust the blade into his chest and held it there until he stopped breathing. I was temporarily relieved. Then I looked into his face and discovered that those horrid eyes were still staring at me. I pulled the knife from his chest and plucked out those eyes. After doing this, I panicked. I threw the knife into the woman's face on

the portrait, and ran out into the pouring rain. I continued to run until I reached home. I felt quite safe in my house, for a while. Then fear began to take me again as I looked into my wife's eyes and found them to be the old man's eyes staring me down. Uncontrollably, I grabbed Beth by the neck and squeezed it until she was no longer breathing and blood was pouring from her mouth.

My two children were screaming in terror. I begged them to stop, but they would not. I looked into their innocent eyes and felt sorry for them and myself and my dead wife. But then those eyes changed, and became the hellish eyes that were the old man's. Once again I was possessed by both fear and rage. Pulling the ax down from the wall, I no longer regarded the two screaming individuals as my children, but as my enemies. Without thought or mercy, I cut both their heads off. The constable then came in and seized me from behind.

Now here I am in this dungeon awaiting my execution, which is not far off. I have been sentenced to hang for the murder of four people; my wife, my two children and that wicked old bastard who is really the cause of my being in such a spot. I was also accused of killing the minister, but believe me, Voltar murdered him, not I.

My friend, I have reached the conclusion that we all have evil tendencies in us, regardless of how religious we are. Whether we will thrive in heaven or perish in hell depends on how well we are able to control these innate tendencies. My warning is simply, control the evil within. I can say no more. My hour has arrived. Please do not get the idea that I fear dying - - after what I've done, I'll be better off dead. What I dread is the idea that I may have the misfortune of meeting that sinister Voltar again when I arrive in hell.

Goodbye, my friend, and God Bless You!

The lily Pad shimmers,
And toady hoppers are jealous
That they just have spots.

I magnified a shimmering sparkler one day
Nursed it to fiery radiance!
But then, the shadows came
And the smothering
...And It left.

The letter,
Resting lazily on a bureau
Remained unopened.

PAULA S. HOLCOMB

i never had a
friend
like you



nobody paints
my head

same shade
of blue

to my surprise
you told everyone
friends -

we were
i never want a friend
like you again



Jan Hartley

The night was quiet and still. The full moon glowed brilliantly through the trees. Suddenly the wind began to blow as wolves howled. It was almost as though the night had come to life from a dead sleep. Just then there appeared a dark figure fluttering around in the moonlight. As it got closer, I recognized it to be a huge bat coming toward me.

Sounds like the introduction to some kind of vampire story, doesn't it. Well, in a way it is. You see I had an experience with a vampire and believe me it was one of the wildest experiences I ever had. Maybe I better explain. What made my experiences so interesting was the vampire himself. I mean this cat was no ordinary run-of-the-mill vampire. In fact, he was probably the coolest undead cat to ever bust out of a coffin.

Let me tell you the story. I was on my way home from my girl's house one night. She didn't live too far from me, so instead of taking the car, I decided to foot it. I headed through the old graveyard. It didn't bother me none since I didn't believe in ghosts and wolfmen and mummies and all that jive. Then it started raining. I mean it was really pouring down. So I ran into this old condemned house which was right across the street from the graveyard.

After getting in the house, the first thing I noticed was a candle burning in one of the windows. Then I started to wonder, could somebody be in here besides me? So then I began to look the place over. It looked the same as any other condemned house; old boards were lying on the floor, dust was on everything, and spider webs were all over the place. In other words, man, the pad was spooky. But you ain't heard nothing yet. I went into the next room and al-

most blew my mind. There was another burning candle sitting on a table, and on the wall was a picture of soul brother number 1-that's right... James Brown; and that ain't all. On the table beside the candle was a can of afro sheen. On the opposite wall was a sign which read, "DO YOUR OWN THING BABY." After seeing this, I came to the conclusion that whoever was shacking up here must be a hip individual.

In the corner of the room was a coffin-like box. My mind told me to open it, but my body said no. At that very moment the coffin began to make a squeaking noise; you know, kind you hear in horror movies. I couldn't believe my eyes. The top of the coffin was coming open. Now I ain't no doe-doe; I know coffins don't open by themselves. Someone has to open them. So who was opening this one? Well, it wasn't long before I found out.

The coffin was completely open and I was ready to split, but I guess I was paralyzed. Then it hit. It must be a vampire, I thought. I had never believed in such things, but... well heck, there it was in living color; and when I say color, I mean color. I expected some pale, blood-thirsty joker to hop out. Man, was I surprised. This cat might have been blood-thirsty, but he damn sure wasn't pale. He was my complexion which is more of a bronze color.

I must say he had a cool looking afro and the Di Sheiky he had on didn't look bad either. He was also wearing bell-bottoms and love beads. Can you imagine that; this creature who can cast a spell of damnation on the best of saints, wearing love beads. Maybe he was a hypocrite. Anyway, this soul brother type of vampire began moving around without even noticing me. He picked up

SOUL DRAC

by O'DELL BURNEY

the afro sheen from the table and sprayed his afro. Pulling out a pair of shades from his pocket, he quickly turned and spotted me. He didn't say a word; instead, he just put on his shades, walked over to a corner where there was a stack of record albums. He picked up half the stack and came to me. He looked me right in the eyes and asked, "Do you dig the blues, daddy?"

"Yea," I answered.

"Groovy, man," he replied, smiling. As he smiled, I noticed his sharp teeth. This really scared me. "Make yourself right at home," he continued. "I got a stereo in the next room that's out of sight. Play it all you want, but don't play it too loud... you'll wake the dead."

I really wanted to split when he said that, but the cat was being nice. He started out of the room. "Where are you going?" I asked.

"To the hospital," he answered.

"I didn't know vampires got sick," I said.

He looked at me and replied, "I ain't sick, man, I'm thirsty. I'm going to the bloodbank." Then he left. As I gazed through the window, I spotted the biggest damn bat I'd ever seen, flying in the moon light.

When I told my girl about this, she thought I had completely blown my mind. I did everything I could to convince her, but you know how stubborn some chicks can be. So I could see that I only had one alternative... take her to see for herself. Now she really thought I was crazy. I practically had to beg her before she agreed. But she did finally agree.

Well, we arrived about midnight. Everything was just as it was the night before; except for one thing... the vampire. We waited for the coffin to open, but it didn't, and we (my girl in

particular) got tired of waiting for it. So I opened the coffin, and guess what. You guessed it. It was empty. This was very embarrassing. Then I thought, maybe he was out. He had to come back before the sun rose, so after some more begging, I talked my girl into spending the night with me there. Well, the night passed and morning came, and that blasted vampire never showed up. Not only was I disappointed, but my girl was furious. She took the whole thing all wrong. She thought I used the vampire story as a means to trick her into sleeping alone with me. But, you know and I know that that wasn't the reason I took her there, although now that I think about it, it wouldn't have been a bad idea, if I had wanted to take her there for that purpose.

My girl was pretty angry, in fact, she said she wasn't going to speak to me again. This didn't bother me too much. My mind was on that vampire. So the very next night, I returned to the old house, and again everything was the same except when I opened the coffin — it was empty again. I didn't know what to think. Maybe it's my imagination, I thought, or maybe the sun caught him before he could make it back home. Just then, I heard his voice. "What's happening baby?"

I almost jumped out of my skin. I turned and found him standing in the doorway. I tried to speak, but first I had to get my nerve back. When I did, I asked, "Where have you been?"

"In the attic," he replied.

"In the attic!" I said. "In the attic! No wonder we couldn't find you. Did you know my girlfriend won't speak to me because of you?" Why did you run off and hide like that?"

He said, "I figured you'd bring somebody here. Look, man, I don't want no publicity.

If that chick of yours would have found me here, within an hour's time half the town would know about me. I'm surprised at you, baby. You know how chicks run their mouths. What are you trying to do, ruin me?"

I admit, I was a little confused. "How can popularity hurt you?" I asked.

"Come on man, get with it," he said. "Why do you think all those vampires that you see in movies and read about got killed? Because everybody knew who they were and where they were. Think about it man, how can anyone kill you if they don't know you exist?"

"I never thought of it that way," I said. "But the cats in my neighborhood are really cool. They wouldn't want to kill you if I told them you were a vampire."

"Maybe not," he replied. "but they'll sure as hell have you in the crazy house before you could count three."

"I see what you mean," I said.

Then he said, "I would rap with you more, but I'm thirsty, man."

Now I was really terrified. I thought he was going to sink those fangs of his in my neck, and I didn't dig that scene. I quickly grabbed my throat, but he assured me that he wasn't going to attack. "I quench my thirst at the bloodbank, daddy," he said. "All that biting jazz done gone out of style. That's old news in my book. When you start biting people, you start getting a lot of attention, and that I don't want. Besides if I did bite, I'd bite chicks, not hardheads like you. Of course, I have to admit, that bloodbank is getting harder to get into. Man, I tell you, being a vampire ain't no easy job."

Well by now, I was feeling sorry for the cat. So I offered my

help. "Look." I said. "Why don't you and I find a chick, and you could quench your thirst."

He stormed back. "Man, you blown your cool or something. I just got through telling you that ..."

I stopped him right there. "If you go to the bloodbank, and get caught, you're in a mess and if you bite somebody and get caught, you'll be in another mess. It's a risk any way you take it. What are you going to do - die of thirst?" He thought for a while. "You're right, man. This is a matter of survival. For an ordinary mortal, you're pretty smart. Let's go." So away we went.

We left in my car. As I drove, I explained that the chick I was taking him to was on drugs and would be better off dead. I don't mean to be bizarre, but the chick had told me that she wanted to die. She even attempted suicide a few times. So I figured what better way to go than by vampire. After all, it isn't everyday, or should I say every night that a girl gets the chance to be bitten by a vampire ... and a black one at that.

After arriving at the chick's house, the vampire and I sneaked in through the bedroom window. We found someone rolling around in the bed. It was the chick. "Well, there she is." I said. "She's all yours."

I expected him to drain her dry. Instead, he just stood there scratching his head. "Why is she rolling around like that?" he asked.

"Probably needs a fix." I answered. "Now go ahead and sink your teeth into that luscious throat."

"Turn on the light." he ordered.

"What?" I replied. "You want to wake her?"

"Turn on the light, man." he ordered again. So I turned the light on. "Ah ha!" he spoke..

"Just what I thought ... she's white."

"So, what's wrong with that." I questioned.

He answered. "Dig it, daddy, I don't want to bite no white chick. I want soul blood to run through my veins."

"This ain't no time to be choosy." I said. "Bite the chick and let's split."

Just then the chick opened her eyes. She started mumbling. "Fix ... a fix ... I need a fix ... give me a fix."

"What are you trying to pull?" the vampire asked.

"What do you mean, what am I trying to pull?" I replied. "I'm trying to help you and this is the thanks I get." Now I was getting angry. "You know what your trouble is?" I think you're prejudiced ... how do you like that - a prejudiced vampire."

We argued on until the bedroom door flew open. It was the chick's old man. I could see the old man's face turn red as he stared me and my fine toothed friend in the eyes. Then he yelled to the top of his voice. "RAPE ... RAPE GET OUT, GET OUT. SOMEBODY CALL THE POLICE. GET AWAY FROM MY DAUGHTER. RAPE ... RAPE ... RAPE."

By this time my friend and I were hauling ass across the lawn. We hopped in the car and expected to go, but we were disappointed. The car wouldn't start.

"What's holding you up man?" asked the vampire.

I said. "I guess I forgot to put gas in it this morning."

Meanwhile, the whole neighborhood was closing in on us. The vampire got out of the car. "So long, man." Before I could say anything, the cat changed into a bat and took off.

Well, I was trapped. The cops got there pretty soon and took me down for questioning. Without thinking, I told them all about the vampire, but of course

they didn't believe me. It's really weird how the poeple in that nieghborhood could concentrate on me so much that they missed seeing that vampire change into a bat and fly off.

Well, anyway, after pleading with the police, I was set free on the grounds that there was not enough evidence against me. I admit I was pretty angry with that vampire, but then I thought it over. If that chick hadn't been white, we might not have had so much trouble. So I decided to try it again ... this time with a soul sister.

The next night, I drove by the old house, picked up the vampire and we were on our way. On the way to the chick's house, I explained that this particular chick had only two months to live, according to her doctor ... So why not give her a head start. After hearing this, the vampire commented. "The first one was on drugs and this one has two months to live. Don't you know any normal girls?"

This chick lived in an upstairs apartment. We climbed the stairs and picked the doorlock with a hairpen. We entered the bedroom and found her sleeping. "All right buddy." I said. "Go to it."

"Not so fast, baby." he replied. "Turn on the light."

I was getting impatient already. "Are you going to start that again?" I asked him. "You don't have to worry, she's black."

"I know." he said. "I want to see how the chick looks. I don't want to bite no ugly joker."

"Boy you sure are picky." I told him as I switched the light on.

When the light came on, the chick woke up. The vampire took one look and said. Man, this chick is uglier than sin." He was right. The chick had a head full of curlers, a face full of cold-cream and pop-eyes. Then I noticed that it wasn't the chick at

all. It was the chick's mother. We were in the wrong bedroom. It was too late to correct our mistake. The old girl let out the loudest scream I ever heard.

It wasn't long before a man came running into the room with a crowbar in his hand. "What are you doing in here with my wife?" he yelled.

"Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaave mercy," the vampire yelled back. "Have mercy, have mercy, have mercy. Did you hear what he said . . . his wife." He looked me straight in the eyes. "Listen, soul brother, I think I better give you a little run down on my rules of conduct. I don't bite white chicks, I don't bite ugly chicks, and most important of all, I don't bite married chicks." Then he turned to the husband. "And as for you, cabbage head, any husband that don't sleep in the same bedroom with his wife, ain't much of a husband. I admit, your wife looks like something that came out of a lagoon, but that's no excuse for you to sleep in a separate room."

The husband simply replied. "I'm gonna tear your tails up with this crowbar."

I was scared to death, man. This cat was closing in with that crowbar, and he was mad. I could see no way out. I asked the vampire for advice. "What are we going to do? He's got us cornered. We're on the second floor, so we can't jump out the window."

He simply replied. "That's what you think. I'll dig you later, daddy." He jumped through the window, changed to a bat and flew like the wind.

Before I could do anything, the husband was on me. "You saw him, didn't you?" I asked, almost in a state of shock. "Didn't you see him? He jumped out of the window and turned into a bat. Didn't you see that?"

He answered. "All I see is you being rushed to the hospital

after I get through working you over with this crowbar."

"Wouldn't it be better if you just call the police?" I suggested.

Lucky for me, he took my advice. The cops took me down for questioning, and again, without thinking, I told them about the vampire, and again they didn't believe me. They wanted to send me to a psychiatrist, but they let me go instead, only because I promised to stay out of trouble.

Well this was the last straw. That vampire had made a fool of me too much. Every time we got in a jam, he'd fly off and leave me to be caught. I couldn't stand it any longer. So I decided to get rid of him . . . or should I say, kill him. It took me a week to work up the nerve, but on Saturday night my mind was made up. I waited until midnight, and then went to the old house. I was armed with a hammer and chisel. Man, I was really scared, but I had to do it. After all, this cat was a potential danger to humanity. The house was just as it always was; candles burning, spider webs, dust, the whole scene. I wanted to get this over with, so I opened the coffin and found him lying as still as ever. I put the chisel over his heart and slowly raised the hammer, but before I brought it down, the vampire came to life.

"Man, what are you doing?" he asked. "Put that thing down."

"I've got to do it." I explained.

"I wish you would." he said. "I just want to know why the devil did you wait till midnight before you came here. Why didn't you come during the day, man. Don't you realize I have all my power at night and none at all during the day. Right now . . . if I wanted to, I could hop out of this coffin and tear you apart; but I don't want to. Instead, I want you to tear me apart."

Man, was I surprised to hear this. All I could say was. "What!"

He went on. "I want you to drive that chisel through my heart. This vampire life just ain't my bag. When I start biting people, I'm asking for trouble, and the bloodbank is completely out of the question. Some cat got wise and hung a cross over every entrance."

"I know." I said. "I did it. There are a lot of people who need that blood. If you drank it all up, those people would die."

"Don't get all uptight about it." he said. "You did the right thing."

The guy was really getting to me. "You're really a great guy." I said. "Even if you are a vampire. You didn't refuse to bite the first chick because she was white, or the second one because she was ugly. I don't think you can bite anyone. You're too nice a guy."

He replied. "That's why I want you to kill me. I'm too tender-hearted to be a vampire."

Now I was really weak. "I can't do it, man." I said.

"You've got to." he said.

"Look at it this way. You'll be doing me a favor. You see, it's the only way my soul can be set free to go to that groovy place called heaven . . . and believe me, there ain't nothing better than a soul brother with a free soul. You dig?"

"I dig." I said. And that was it. What I mean is, I did it. I freed his soul.

Well, that's my story. And you know something, my girlfriend still doesn't believe it . . . and she still won't speak to me either. But that jive don't bother me because I'm glad to know that somewhere in that pad in the sky is the coolest vampire excuse me . . . the coolest ex-vampire anyone could ever meet.



Haiku

As I watch you there
I long to feel your embrace
... I tremble... thinking.

He is unworthy
to be called a man -- and yet
he is but a man.

Softly falls the rain,
gray sheets glide along the road.
A lonely bird sings.

CHRISTINE BAUER

what will become of me
now that I know the truth,
now that I'm aware of it?

What will my reaction be
when I see your face,
as you pass me by?

What will I do
when I look into your eyes,
and see the nothingness
I said does not exist?

It seems so strange
to say it's over,
when I'd but thought
it'd just begun.

But that's the way it is,
you know,
Affection is not to be
considered a serious matter.

-- Alas, I forgot!

rain

does not interfere

with music

it becomes
part of it...

shar

...like rain
that becomes part
of the environment
of the tropic

TDY

by CABOT TOWNSEND

I sat down on my bunk and listened to the bedspring's melancholy squeak. Outside my window a vicious red slash painted the sky between smoky clouds as the sun fell into somber Georgia pines.

The starched white collar of my hospital smock became stiffly irritating and I began to unbutton it. Down the barrack's hall I could hear Bradshaw playing his french horn, as he does every Friday night after getting drunk on a bottle to ETH and codeine.

Georgia is a hell-hole for a New England yankee. The benevolent Air Force placed twenty of us here, all assigned to the 4440th USAF Hospital. Of the twenty, only Lupe and I were still considered unadaptable. We had done everything we could think of to get us transferred. Nothing worked, but we continued to harass the brass and maintain our individualism. After all, we thought, we

could end up like Bradshaw, a broken spirit, with no enjoyment except his Friday night stupor.

A sudden kicking at the door broke my concentration of the sunset. I knew it was Lupe . . . he never knocks, he kicks.

"Yo! Its open," I yelled.

In strode Lupe, still spit and polish in his white uniform. Lupe isn't what you'd call a sharp troop, but he does have an uncanny ability to wear a uniform correctly. He'd look good in a garbage collector's uniform.

Lupe and I were both assigned to the Emergency Room of the hospital, but he actually worked the Immunization Clinic, or "shot room". I work only in the Emergency Room. We used to work the shot room together, but the "Recalcitrant Plebney" hoax ended that.

Lupe and I had a mutual dislike for trainee pilots. These second lieutenants, or ninety-day wonders as we called them, had a

nasty habit of using their newly acquired rank to make life easier for them at our expense.

That was what happened during our annual influenza vaccination program. We had to inoculate the entire base, a large job for only two medics. We had succeeded except for one hold-out squadron of pilot-trainees. They were scheduled for shots Friday afternoon, but that particular Friday there was to be a bash at the Officer's Club in the evening. Through crying, conniving, and some pull of rank, they received permission to get their shots Saturday morning. Their reason was that flu shots make one feel lousy for a few hours after injection and they wanted to be in top condition for their party. When we found out we'd be working on a Saturday, we felt lousy ourselves . . . and so "Recalcitrant Plebney" was born.

We set up the usual shot tray for flu inoculations, and in addi-

tion we set up a second tray with medicine cups. In the medicine cups were a mixture of "hunch-punch" (a combination of ethyl alcohol and Goofy Grape) and Ipecac (an emetic which causes nausea and vomiting used for poison ingestion).

The pilots came in, straggling in two's and three's, mumbling their incoherent comments of last night's occasion at the O-Club. We gave them each a required injection and instructed them to also take an oral dose of "Recalcitrant Plebney" vaccine. Hung-over pilot-trainees follow instructions blindly. After the pilots got their shots, drank the contents of the medicine cups and had their shot records stamped, we told them to wait in the hospital area for fifteen minutes in case there were any adverse reactions. A standard operational procedure.

Oh, were there reactions... in less than ten mute minutes a chorus of retching pilots ran for exits or bathrooms, with their hands held protectively over their mouths.

Monday morning we were scraping wax out of corners with razor blades. I was permanently removed from the shot room under orders never to be found there again. It wasn't all punishment though; a group of NCO's bought us many rounds at the Non-commissioned Officer's club that night.

Lupe dropped himself on the bunk opposite mine. "Where've you been all day?" he asked.

"Hiding out. Strife wants my butt chewed, blue'd, and tattoo'd," I answered.

"Wazoo! Man, what'd you do?" a little surprised, probably because he wasn't involved.

"My locker door incriminated me," I told him, "I'm un-american."

Sitting on my bunk, I

unloaded the morning's activity to him. It began with the weekly inspection. I felt a twinge of sadistic pride as I told him about it. There was a room inspection every Friday in the barracks, but the routine was altered slightly by the announcement of an open-locker inspection, too. I wasn't concerned by it, my locker was always open to public scrutiny. I thought everyone knew its contents...

I was ordering sterile supplies in the Emergency Room, when I received the order to report to my quarters. I left the hospital and jogged over to the barracks. Waiting for me in my room were Lt. Egret, squadron commander and Strife, the First Sergeant. They were standing in front of three open lockers. St. Egret wasn't paying much attention to the inspection. He was daydreaming about his fraternity days he had left behind him just a few short months ago.

The lieutenant was a new replacement. He had been on base for just a week and at the suggestion of Col. Meelee our hospital commander, he was making his first inspection. Egret's boyish features and his youthful naivety made us think fondly of him as "Lt. Fuzz" from the Beetle Bailey comic strip. He had no idea what he was inspecting for, so he let Strife conduct the whole affair, while he remained a facade of rank.

Strife, on the other hand, was a tough troop. A twenty-year man, Korean War vet, and career NCO, who has his wife tie his shoes for him every morning, (lacking intelligence to do it himself.) He was the one who called me to my quarters.

Strife snarled and Egret looked surprised when I entered the room and snapped to attention. One must play the game, but one can change the rules.

"Darby!" barked Strife, "What is this?" He was pointing into the first locker.

"A Play-boy center-fold, sir," I answered, making sure the "sir" came loud and clear. You can get sloppy with officers, but an NCO demands a military response.

"How about this?" inquired Strife, going into the second locker.

"A poster of Raquel Welch, sir." I answered, this time confusion marred my reply. My mind tried to race ahead of his next question, but it could not gain reason for this strange interrogation.

Strife stepped to the third locker, my locker and a smile twisted across his large, bulky face. He pointed to the uppermost picture and asked in a lethal tone, "Who is this?"

"Rassputin, sir," I said, feeling more bewildered.

"Who?" demanded Strife, not satisfied with just a name.

"Rassputin, the Russian monk, who..." I never finished.

"A commie, huh," Strife accused.

Lt. Egret began to shake as he tried to suppress a laugh which came out as a gurgle anyway.

Strife, ignoring the lieutenant, went on. Thumbing another picture, he asked, "This another one of your crummy commie heroes?"

The picture in question, being a copy of St. Thomas Becket. He didn't wait for an answer this time, but continued through the collage of pictures, clippings, and poems and denounced each one as un-American, even the likeness of old Horace Greeley.

"Darby," he began, trying to re-arrange his concrete personality into that of the paternal, understanding sergeant, although it gave him the appearance of having heartburn, "Why don't

you have any pictures of naked girls in your locker?"

"I haven't gotten around to putting one up," I answered, forgetting the sir this time.

"Listen Darby," he said speaking softly in his buddy-to-buddy guise, "If you have one, I want you to stick it up there now and cover that other crap. Let me know you're a red-blooded American. A man."

"Sure," I obliged in less than military form.

"I just thought some people might not like it," I continued as I pulled a poster out of a drawer, unfolded it from their sight, and taped it over the other paraphernalia on the door. I stepped back, revealing to Strife and Egret a full-length, color poster of a nude "Lady-bird" Johnson astride a Harley-Davidson chopper.

"I couldn't find Pat Nixon," I attempted to explain, but it never registered on the sergeant's reddening face.

Before Strife could muster forth the bellow he was building up in his lungs, the lieutenant had intervened.

"Uh, Sergeant . . . perhaps we er . . . can get back to this later. Let's get this damn thing over with. I don't want to miss lunch. And, personally I don't think Darby has gone against any regulation.

"Excuse me, sir," pleaded Strife, knowing fully well that even a second lieutenant had rank over him, "but this man is almost a confessed commie sympathizer, he's un-American. He doesn't even have naked women in his locker. He might me gay or somethin . . ."

Strife's words reached closed ears. Egret turned and left the room and the defeated First Sergeant followed.

"Wazoo!" from Lupe, "Strife must still have it in for you because of the flower caper."

The flower caper was in reference to one morning last week when Strife came into the Emergency Room complaining of a cold. I was doing razor blade duty for a minor infraction of some obsolete regulation. Strife had meted out the punishment knowing I hated scraping wax out of corners. One must play the game but one can change the rules.

The doctor and staff were busy with other patients, so I left the wax scraping and typed him on the patient list. I then put him in the treatment room, told him to strip completely, and lie face down on the exam table. Strife really does lack self-sufficiency in thinking, as he is so used to following the orders of others. He obeyed with no question or restraint. While he was stripping, I slipped out of the exam room and plucked a plastic daisy from a fake flower setting on one of the waiting room's tables.

treatment room, I told Strife I was going to take a rectal temp. He payed no attention to me as I tucked the greased plastic flower where it would serve its purpose best. I then left him to be discovered by the doctor.

Later that day, thanks to the staff grapevine, the word was all over the hospital about Strife and his flower.

Lupe and I started laughing together, thinking about the incident. I stopped laughing first and asked.

"OK, so what do we do tonight?"

"Wazoo! I almost forgot," said Lupe, turning serious. "We've got a TDY run. They want us to pick up a patient . . . car accident, I think, and take him to Jacksonville Naval Air Station."

"Navy?" I asked.

"Guess so. Can't be hurt too bad if they want us to drive him

all the way down to Jax, instead of bringing him here. Probably stationed there."

I nodded in agreement. I got up off the bunk and went over to my locker to dig out my special TDY "bag." In it were everything necessary for a TDY trip; civilian clothing, shaving gear, bottle of ETH and codeine, and Preludin pep pills.

TDY is short for Temporary Duty. To us it means a free overnight trip in an ambulance, with pay if we come back. While we were gone we'd be temporarily assigned to no one. The Air Force does make its mistakes. One must play the game, but one can change the rules.

"Let's go," I urged, grabbing one last article, my portable cassette tape player and hustled out the door. We stopped by Lupe's room where he retrieved an identical TDY bag and double-timed it over to the hospital.

The ambulance purred, sleek and long, down Highway 86. We were moving along at a fast clip, about 75 miles per hour. Georgia highways are flat and straight. They're just great for non-committal driving.

Lupe was behind the wheel and I was fiddling with cassette tapes, trying to read the labels in the less than adequate map light on the dash.

"Wazoo!" Be in Thomasville in another ten minutes," Lupe said. "Pour up some more 'hunch-punch.'"

"Double Wazoo! Coming right up." I answered, reaching for ice I had collected at the Emergency Room. We had also mixed a batch of 'hunch-punch' there.

I glanced at my watch, noting it was just before seven. If we were lucky, we'd have the patient loaded and on our way to Jax before seven-thirty. That would make it around nine-thirty when we would reach Jackson-

ville Naval Air Station. We'd have plenty of time to party around Jacksonville Beach after we dropped off our patient. My mental planning was cut short when Lupe announced, "Time to stash the goodies," and he tucked his cup under the seat.

I followed the suggestion and started putting things out of sight. Too bad, Jacksonville was still a long way off, and we'd have to go it dry as long as we had a patient.

We pulled into the entrance marked "Emergency Receiving" and backed the ambulance up to the wide double-doors. Before going in, we both swallowed a Preludin and washed it down with a toast of 'hunch\ punch.'

The nurse-receptionist at the desk greeted us coldly. She gave us the patient's treatment sheet and led us to an exam room where we met our cargo. John Henry Devens was a six foot four Negro and built like a football half-back. He was taped with thick strips of adhesive around his chest, broken rib or two no doubt, and bandages over his nose and left eye. He sat up, swaying on the exam-table, and eyed the nurse with suspicion. He, then spotted us behind her and smiled. I had doubts about his sobriety, even before he hiccup'd and said,

"Da men inna white coats has finally cum' fo me. I'se doomed! Po John Henry."

"Can you walk?" asked Lupe.

"Sho-nuff I can walk," he said smiling amiably as he slid from the table. He tested his legs, took a few steps, winced, and then smiled again as he said, "That do smart a bit, tho," holding his side where the pain was.

"Fractured rib," interjected the stone-faced nurse in a medical matter-of-fact tone. "You should keep him lying down."

And with that, she turned and walked back to her desk signifying that it was time for us to

depart.

"Welcome aboard, John Henry. Let's travel."

Outside, John Henry looked admiringly at the ambulance. He walked around it twice and exclaimed, "Bonneville, man that's almost as good as a Lincoln or a Caddy."

"John Henry, where's that old Georgia hush-puppy slur you had back in there?" I asked surprised.

"Brother, where's your head. You don't talk any jive to these decent southern white baptists down here. Man, you play it dumb and Uncle Tom. You live a lot longer."

"Amen," I said.

One must play the game, but one can change the rules.

"Wazoo!"

"Double Wazoo!" from Lupe.

"Triple Wazoo!" from John Henry.

Introductory conversation proved John Henry to be likeable and trust-worthy. He made light jokes, such as having to sit in the back of the ambulance and such. When we did invite him up front, he declined, saying he was far more comfortable lying down on the stretcher. Stone-face was right on that count... One point for her! After further understanding was reached, we decided we could disclose the truth about our mission of mercy. Getting a favorable response from him, we gave him some 'hunch punch' and the three of us sifted into silence, listing to Joe Cocker on the cassette player.

We were half way to Jacksonville, Lupe noted that we were down to a quarter tank of gas, so we decided to stop and fill up at the next one we passed. In the back of the ambulance, John Henry was sleeping silently. So quiet, he could be mistaken for a

corpse, except for an occasional stir. He was as sound a sleeper as I've ever seen.

"Looks dead, don't he," said Lupe, looking into the rear-view mirror.

"No reason why he couldn't be," I laughed. I turned to the back, gently unfolded a spare sheet, and spread it over him so only his bare feet were exposed.

"Now that's a corpse," said Lupe, admiring the finished product just as we turned into an all-night gas station.

The young station attendant walked slowly up to the ambulance in a style of red-neck arrogance. He pushed greasy blond hair from his freckled face and drawled,

"Hey, y'all. Fill it up?"

"Yeah, and check it under the hood," answered Lupe. He sauntered to the rear of the ambulance and his eyes focused on the corpse. He looked down the length of the body and his eyes stopped at John Henry's toes. I could imagine that little blond hairs on the back of his neck were rising uncontrollably. He quickly started the gas pumping and with a bug-eyed expression, exclaimed,

"Y'all got a dead nigger back there!"

"No!" said Lupe faking surprise, "Really?"

"Just work quietly," I said, getting out of the ambulance and heading for the rest room, "We don't want to wake the dead."

Lupe followed, leaving one nervous young attendant checking the oil and water, and casting fearful looks into the rear of the ambulance.

When we came back, the attendant was putting the cap back on the gas tank. When he saw us his courage rose within him.

"Where you takin' this heah dead nigger?"

"Jacksonville," I answered, getting behind the wheel to spell

Lupe. "Well, Ah be danged. Looks lak we have one less boy t' worry about."

He took our credit card, stamped the credit slip, and handed it back with the receipt, just as Lupe opened the door and got in the passenger's side. The attendant continued arrogantly, "You boys stop on ya way back, mebbe Ah'll have another one fo ya. Y'all know the only good nigger, is a dea . . ." Before he completed the sentence, Lupe had slammed his door, and John Henry, sheet and all, sat up. Our prejudiced friend rolled his eyes into the back of his head and passed out cold on the gas pump island. Feeling we had over-stayed our welcome, we drove on.

"What was that all about?" asked a puzzled John Henry ten minutes later.

"Oh not much, just teaching a young rebel never to mess with a white sheet," I answered. Lupe and I laughed for quite a while after that.

The Preludin had taken its effect on us, and Lupe and I had a running, non-stop conversation going. John Henry made quips from the back and hit the "hunch punch" liberally. We all stayed in good spirits until we reached Jacksonville city limits. It was then that John Henry began to sulk. Lupe, noticing the change in him, asked, "Whatsa matter, John Henry?"

"I'se sho don' feel up t' bein' fussed ovah by no nurse in no hospital," he said shifting back into his shuffling Uncle Tom talk.

"What else is there to do?" I asked testing him.

"Maybe, we could have us a party," he answered testing us.

"What sort of party, where?"

The testing went on until we formulated a little conspiracy between us.

John Henry had a girlfirend in Jacksonville, with whom he

had a very solid relationship. He would give her a call and get a little party together. One must play the game, but one can change the rules.

Luna, John Henry's girlfriend had a cozy little apartment, chock full of soul, right down to the leopard-skin pattern rug on the livingroom floor. Luna worked in the secretarial pool of one of Jacksonville's larger businesses. She was close friends with most of the secretaries, many of whom lived in the same building.

She had invited two of them, Kim and Sandy, up to her apartment to meet us. Two shining knights of mercy, dressed in white.

We drove into the parking lot, parked the ambulance in the darkest corner, and scuttled out of the doors. John Henry led the way, clutching his dixie cup of "hunch punch." When we reached the apartment, we were greeted by three beautiful female things, three scotch and waters, and the sounds of Creedence Clearwater Revival.

A serene little party we had, Luna and John Henry, Lupe and Sandy, and Kim and I. Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice didn't show up.

Sometime during the night, Lupe disappeared with Sandy. I could've sworn I heard the ambulance siren just before Kim and I fell asleep under a blanket hastily thrown on the floor.

I was the first one awake the next morning. Out in the parking lot I found Lupe and Sandy asleep in the back of the ambulance. I woke them up and we all went back to the apartment to check on John Henry.

He was a mess. All his bandages had come loose. While we worked over John Henry, changing his dressings, the sleepy-eyed

girls went into the kitchenette and made coffee. We drank coffee and made small talk, while Lupe went over John Henry's medical records, changing times and dates, so it appeared that his accident occurred in the wee hours of the morning. All records look sloppy, so the changes wouldn't raise suspicions in the least. After one last cup of coffee we said goodbye and promised to keep in touch.

A while later, we had delivered John Henry to the hospital, and with no additional fanfare, we started back to our base. Of course we took particular care not to stop at a certain gas station. We didn't talk much on the way back, although I was curious about the siren I thought I'd heard. Lupe looked too tired to answer any questions, so I let the inquisitive urge pass. We got back to base late in the afternoon, and headed straight for the barracks after we signed the ambulance in.

I spent all day in town, Sunday, so I didn't see Lupe again until Monday morning during breakfast in the mess hall. Lupe looked a little worried, and I noticed we had the attention of the Registrar Office personnel.

Five minutes after duty began, I got orders to report to the Orderly Room, the heart of the hospital and Strife's domain. I met Lupe heading down the corridor in the same direction, under the same orders. We entered the Orderly Room and snapped to attention in front of the First Sergeant's desk. Strife looked up at us, with his 'Monday morning - I - hate - you' scowl.

"Boys," said Strife, the smile forming and twisting, "We've got a little discrepancy on one of our ambulances' mileage charts. Perhaps you can clear it up. Says here, you went three hundred and fifty miles on a round trip to Jacksonville."

"That's right, sir," I an-

swered.

"Well for some unknown reason, the speedometer on the ambulance you signed out, has an additional hundred and fifty miles on it. Now, explain that!"

"Er... we got lost," I answered feebly, looking at Lupe for aid.

A long series of direct questions and evasive answers followed. Strife kept us on the hook for twenty minutes. Although he couldn't prove us guilty of defying any regulation, we also couldn't convince him of our total innocence. He gave us extra-duty punishment.

"For the hell of it," he said.

That afternoon, our regular duty shift behind us, we were down on our hands and knees scraping wax out of corners with razor blades. The corridors were empty, so I ask him freely, "Where'd you go with the ambulance the other night?"

"St. Augustine. Sandy told me they had the oldest jail in the country down there. I think she just dug the siren and flashing red-light, though."

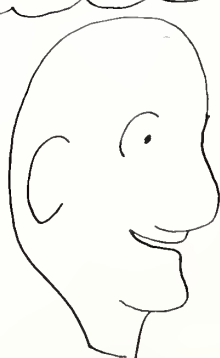
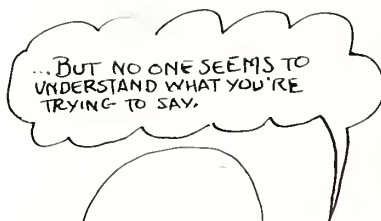
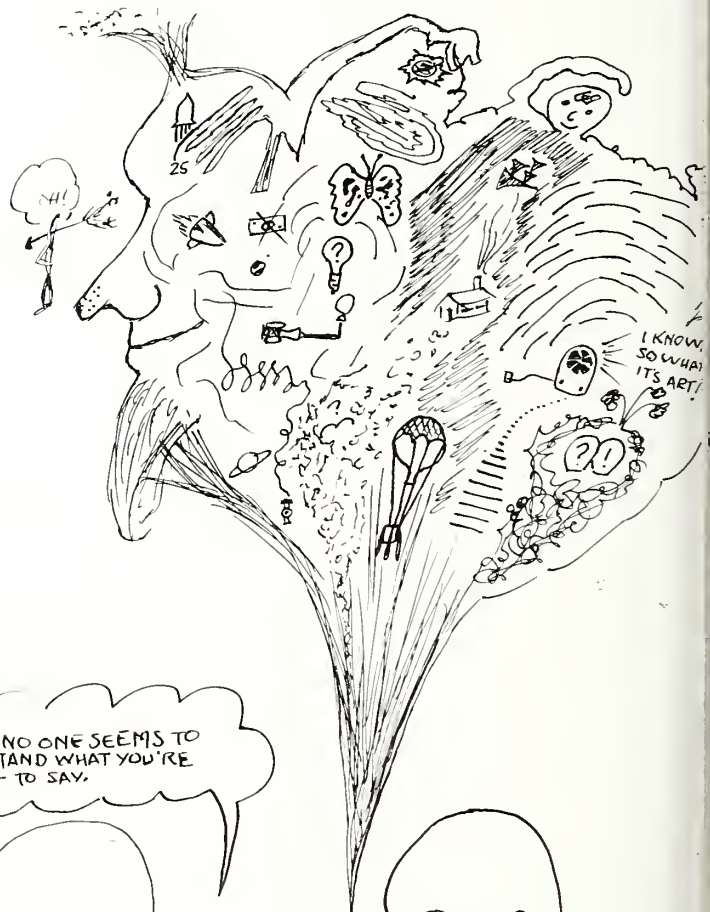
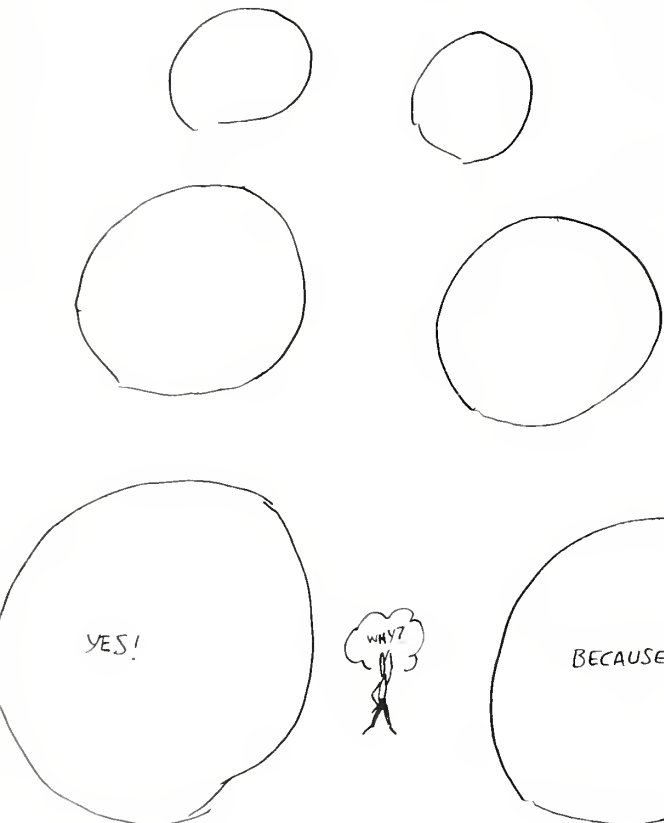
"Meatball," I muttered, he looked offended, and I thought if I were in the same situation, I would have driven down to St. Augustine to see the jail too. I asked him, "Did you see the jail?"

"Nope, got lost!"

We both laughed, and then resumed work in silence, until Lupe exclaimed, "Wazoo! Next time... what we'll do is disconnect that speedometer cable when we get to where we are supposed to be."

"Wazoo," I answered, thinking about all the future TDY's and what we could make of them. One must play the game, but one can change the rules.





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SENSE
?

I ASSUMED THAT THIS WAS OBVIOUS; YOU SEE, FIRST ON THE AGENDA- PEOPLE HAVE TO BE INSTRUCTED IN RETROSPECT TO THE NEW FACT. IF ALL OF HUMANKIND WAS IMPRESSED THAT 3 GOING INTO 21 WAS 7 (AND I WASN'T) SCHOLARS WOULD BE CONFRONTED WITH THE PROBLEM OF INVISIBLE OR PERDUISTIC EDUCATIVE ICONOCLASM. HOWEVER, 3 MIGHT BE ABLE TO GO INTO 21 LESS THAN 7 TIMES...

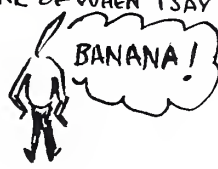


I SEE THAT MY THEOREM IS MUCH TOO BASIC, LET ME EMERGE INTELLIGENSIA

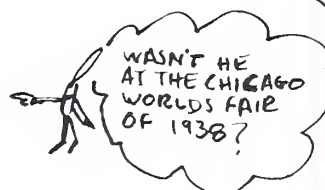


-POOF-

O.K.- WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHEN I SAY BANANA?



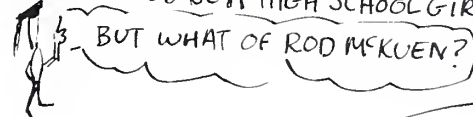
I THINK OF POETICUS: I THINK OF PHALLIC MASCULINITY, SYMBOLIC, METAPHORIC IMAGERY...



LOOK... IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BE SERIOUS!



AT ANY RATE, THE ARTIST HAS A RIGHT TO EXHIBIT OBSCURITY GAD, IF HE WERE NORMAL, "BLUE BOY" WOULD BE JUST A KID DOWN THE BLOCK; PRUFROK WOULD BE A BAR-B-QUE BUDDY; VENUS WOULD BE A HIGH SCHOOL GIRL WITH PIMPLES



OH, WELL... UMM... OH... PHWO...

*Kevin Julian Canderbrook
Nov 1370

THE LAST STORY

by STEVE HUMPHRIES

He tiredly placed the thick volume on the near by night stand and slipped beneath the clean white sheets with a sigh. A tanned, well-proportioned arm reached up to the night lamp and turned it off, immediately plunging the room into obscurity. The luminous dials of his watch cast the only source of pale light. He unconsciously noticed the time; one minute before midnight. He humorously thought "one minute before the witching hour."

Though tired and exhausted from a busy day, his mind was too busy conjuring up thoughts about the book that lay beside him to allow him to sleep. It was a strange book - - quite fascinating - - but terrifying in an indefinable way. And it was incredibly old - - almost ancient. It wasn't its appearance exactly, one couldn't describe in through sight alone. No, it was how it felt . . . smelt even. The stories contained were exciting but were - - well - - preposterous Yes! preposterous was the word. Quite.

Funny, he thought, that no one had bought it before he had. It had been placed prominently on a lower shelf when he had seen it. That proprietor had certainly seemed relieved when he had purchased the volume. Like he had gotten rid of some evil menace or some other preposterous thing like that!

His hand briefly touched the worn leather cover. It seemed cold - - yet alive to the touch. Quickly he withdrew his hand. And the hints the old man had given him about its past owners! Utter nonsense! But, he wondered, why had the past owners given up such a book.

He tried to close his mind to such disturbing thoughts - - but to no avail. Such strange stories, he murmured. It must have been a genius who had written them - - or a madman.

What had the bookkeeper said about not reading it at night? He had quite offhandedly dismissed it. But it had roused his curiosity. Strange

He sat up with a cold start. He had been on the very edge of sleep, but he had heard--had he heard--a noise; a creak of strained wood against a sole, tortured glass that been pressed against: as a window is raised. His mind raced through a thousand possible explanations. Cold, clammy sweat seemed to break out on him; he shivered, not from the suddenly cold-dead-room, but from something intangible, fearful.

Preposterous, he muttered. Utter nonsense. He was conscious of the solid darkness that pervaded the

room. Like a solid black curtain it surrounded him . . . closing in on him.

He shook his head to clear away the most disturbing thoughts. It's like that story he had just finished. The sudden coldness of the room . . . the darkness . . . the sound . . . there it was again!

No! his mind screamed. Such things can't be! It's just my imagination - - that's all. Reading that blasted book before going to bed and being so tired.

That's all!

I shall go to sleep and escape such nonsense. Utter nonsense.

Sleep and its escape lapped around him, taking him deeper and deeper into unconsciousness. Limbo was in his grasp. He was floating . . . floating like a cloud.

And he was falling, eternally falling, now down - - now sideways - - but always falling. A tremor of fear streaked across his mind - - and of realization. The book - - the last story - - the darkness.

He screamed . . . and awoke.

He was falling! Down, down into the abyss of darkness. No bed - - no room - - no nothing.

Just darkness.

Something briefly touched him. He writhed in torture. Fear whitening his dark hair.

It was that hideous book!

It was falling with him . . . no . . . not falling, following him. It was watching him.

Futilely he struck out, spinning it into limbo. He laughed - - but no sound came.

The book whizzed back. Laughing - - a crazy, insane, hideous laugh. His laugh.

The pages whipped open, turning faster than the eye could follow. It stopped at the last story. He could not read it; he knew that it had stopped there.

Then light erupted around him.

Not bright light that one could see. It was an effusive light irradiating from all about him.

And tall - - immensely tall - - cold, grey skyscrapers with leering, blank eyes.

Watching him.

The empty streets with their cold, lifeless look. Watching him.

He was nearing the ground floor - - the last story.

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